



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 07484809 8









1

2



**THE  
MADONNA OF THE HILLS**

*10*



# THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

*A Story of a New York  
Cabaret Girl*

7439

BY  
ARTHUR GUY EMPEY

*Author of*  
"OVER THE TOP" "FIRST CALL"  
"TALES FROM A DUGOUT" ETC.



L.C.

HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS  
NEW YORK AND LONDON

1921

60

nd

1



PROPERTY  
OF THE  
NEW YORK  
SOCIETY FOR THE

**THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS**

Copyright, 1921, by Harper & Brothers  
Printed in the United States of America

≡

**To My Mother**





## CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	VIRTUE . . . . .	1
II.	THE EAST SIDE . . . . .	14
III.	JOHNNY MULDOON . . . . .	22
IV.	COCAINE . . . . .	33
V.	BLACKLISTED . . . . .	39
VI.	EAST OF THIRD AVENUE . . . . .	47
VII.	WEST OF THIRD AVENUE . . . . .	55
VIII.	THE TEST . . . . .	60
IX.	TWELVE YEARS LATER . . . . .	66
X.	"MOTHER" . . . . .	76
XI.	BEHIND THE GREEN LIGHTS . . . . .	81
XII.	ROULETTE JACK . . . . .	88
XIII.	THE MAJESTY OF THE LAW . . . . .	93
XIV.	WEBER'S VAUDEVILLE HOUSE . . . . .	99
XV.	MOLLIE TAKES A PARTNER . . . . .	111
XVI.	STRIKING OUT . . . . .	115
XVII.	THE SCALES OF JUSTICE . . . . .	118
XVIII.	MCCANN'S DEPARTMENT STORE . . . . .	125
XIX.	JAKE . . . . .	133
XX.	DONNELLY'S CABARET . . . . .	139
XXI.	MOLLIE BOWS TO NEW YORK . . . . .	146
XXII.	"FIFTY-FIFTY" . . . . .	153
XXIII.	NANNETTE OF THE FIREFLY DANCE . . . . .	160
XXIV.	DAVIS, FRIEND AND BENEFactor . . . . .	167
XXV.	SING SING . . . . .	172
XXVI.	LOOKING BACKWARD . . . . .	177
XXVII.	ENTER DONNELLY . . . . .	181
XXVIII.	THE REAPER . . . . .	187
XXIX.	ON HER OWN . . . . .	192
XXX.	DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND . . . . .	198
XXXI.	DRESSING-ROOM POLITICS . . . . .	202

# CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
XXXII.	THE CHORUS GIRL . . . . .	209
XXXIII.	JIM CURTIS . . . . .	212
XXXIV.	"INSIDE STUFF" . . . . .	221
XXXV.	MULDOON, ALIAS MORGAN . . . . .	225
XXXVI.	ON BROADWAY . . . . .	230
XXXVII.	DAVIS TAKES A TRICK . . . . .	234
XXXVIII.	THE FRAME-UP . . . . .	240
XXXIX.	MOLLIE MEETS DAVIS . . . . .	246
XL.	"DREAMS" . . . . .	250
XLI.	PLANTING THE SEED . . . . .	254
XLII.	GRATITUDE . . . . .	262
XLIII.	THE PRICE OF A KISS . . . . .	268
XLIV.	THE SURRENDER . . . . .	273
XLV.	THE AWAKENING . . . . .	278
XLVI.	JAMMING THE BRACE . . . . .	283
XLVII.	THE RAT PAYS . . . . .	288
XLVIII.	THE GET-AWAY . . . . .	295
XLIX.	MOLLIE "WESTON" . . . . .	299
L.	EAGLE NEST . . . . .	307
LI.	THE PARSON . . . . .	313
LII.	"CATS" . . . . .	316
LIII.	CUPID GETS BUSY . . . . .	324
LIV.	THE SUBPCENA . . . . .	328
LV.	THE HOUSE OF GOD . . . . .	330
LVI.	UTOPIA . . . . .	337
LVII.	ANTONIO FELUCCI . . . . .	340
LVIII.	THE STORM . . . . .	344
LIX.	THE AFTERMATH . . . . .	353
LX.	"THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS" . . . . .	361
LXI.	THE GRINNING HEAD . . . . .	363
LXII.	THE NOTEBOOK . . . . .	368
LXIII.	THE RAT SEES A WAY . . . . .	375
LXIV.	OLD BILL TELLS A LIE . . . . .	382
LXV.	MOLLIE DECIDES . . . . .	387
LXVI.	"HERE COMES THE BRIDE" . . . . .	391
LXVII.	THE RAT REMEMBERS . . . . .	395
LXVIII.	"COMING THROUGH" . . . . .	399

**THE  
MADONNA OF THE HILLS**



# THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

## I

### VIRTUE

WEBER'S Vaudeville House on the East Side was crowded. Those aisles which were out of range of the sleepy fireman were blocked with eager people who were paying more attention to the audience than to what was taking place on the stage. The reason was that the management ran two shows nightly, and it was nearing nine thirty, the time the first one was scheduled to end. The crowd in the aisles was watching with eager eyes for some one to vacate a seat. Fat Mrs. Rosen was being constantly reminded by her three children that she "get it a seat together."

Abie Schoenfeldt, with Gladys, his Sunday-night sweetheart, was arguing with a sweating usher that fifteen cents was enough "graft" for "two seats together in the fifth row off the aisle." The usher was stubbornly holding out that a quarter was the regular rate. Abie paid the quarter.

It was hot in the theater and hot outside. The doors to the exits were open, but this did not relieve the situation overmuch, because the torrid July night air was

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

hardly a degree cooler than that inside. Numerous electric fans stirred up the foul air and wafted it from one corner to another. It was simply an exchange of poisoned atmosphere, but the sleepy, droning hum of the fans deluded the audience into the belief it was breathing fresh air.

So far, the show had not been good, and the audience was quick to voice its disapproval of the acts which did not come up to East Side standard. A card on an easel in the corner of the stage informed that "Adele Murphy, Dublin's Sweetest Songstress," was singing. The constant cracking of peanut shells, with the occasional noise of an empty "pop" bottle kicked over under the seats, indicated the audience was restless and did not appreciate her vocal efforts.

Jake Weber, the owner of the house, was in no way affected by the heat. He was rubbing his hands together in appreciation of the crowded aisles, which meant the box-office balance for the week would be greatly in his favor. The fireman, who was sleepily leaning against one of the rear seats in the orchestra, yawned, slowly looked around, and noticed the overcrowding.

Weber, from his vantage point in the rear, was watching the fireman, and, seeing his movement, quickly went over and slapped him familiarly on the back. "Good evening, Mr. Riley," he said, in honeyed tones. "Have it a cigar. Come on in my office and sit down and have a smoke."

"A hell of a chanst I got for smoking," answered Riley, "when the inspector is liable to drop in any minute. Never mind the cigar; just clear them aisles before I get yanked up on the carpet again. You know the fire ordinance, and I'm here to see that you carry it out."

Mustering all the amiability at his command, Jake tried

## VIRTUE

to convince Riley that "it was for only about ten minutes," but Riley was stubborn and refused to listen and started in the direction of the crowded aisles. Jake, with an inward sigh, extracted a two-dollar bill from his roll and, palming it, slipped it into the open and waiting hand of Riley. "Why didn't you say so at first?" replied the fireman, putting the money in his pocket. "Sure and there's no harm for a few innocent people to edge into the aisles where they can get a better look at the show."

Jake, with a satisfied smile, left, and, going into his office, told the cashier she had better "dock" the door-keeper two dollars for being absent last Thursday. "There ain't no protection from grafting city employees for an honest American citizen running a legitimate business," he mumbled, as he returned to the lobby.

"Adele Murphy, Dublin's Sweetest Songstress," finishing the last note of "Mother Machree," paused for an instant, expectant, waiting for the outburst of applause which did not materialize, then with her sweetest stage smile, which caused her dimples to crack the grease paint, she bowed herself gracefully into the wings.

Isadore Stein, touted on the one-sheets as "Apollo, the Grecian Model of Physical Perfection," was waiting his turn to display his very much bepowdered muscles, in the light of the spot, against a black drop.

"You got it a swell act!" he volunteered, sarcastically, as Adele Murphy passed him.

The stage smile of Dublin's Sweetest Songstress froze into a hard look. "Ah, go to hell!" she snapped. "You kikes give me a pain. That bunch o' cattle don't know a voice when they hears one. Why, last week at Miner's I knocked 'em out o' their seats."

Apollo did not reply; he was too busy assuming his position on an empty soap box, draped with black velvet,



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

to simulate Ajax lifting the globe—minus the gl  
Large drops of perspiration were running down his ma  
white arms, leaving dirty streaks in the powder, like di  
up creek beds against a mountain side of heather.

Miss Murphy was crossing to her dressing room w  
Tom Mills, of the Mills & Eastman song-and-dance  
accosted her.

"Say, kid, how did it go?" he asked.

"Same as last night—rotten!" replied Adele, in diag  
as she dabbed her perspiring face with a dainty hand  
chief. "Those boobs out in front must be handcuffed

Suddenly from the house came a roar of applause.  
the sound Adele paused and bit her lip in anger.

"That's it. Just listen to 'em!" she exclaimed. "Y  
in' their heads off for a talcum-powdered kike who m  
faces with his muscles—that's the kind of stuff they w  
nowadays; a voice 'ain't got no chance."

Tom Mills came closer and, placing his hand on  
bare shoulder, squeezed it a little. "Nix, that ain'  
kid," he droned. "What you needs in your act is the  
pep. You oughta work double. Say! with a d  
sandwiched in the act will go big. How about it?"

"Where do you get that stuff?" she sneered, nettle  
his criticism. "I 'ain't never heard the house come d  
on the Mills and Eastman act."

"Now, listen, Adele," pleaded he, slipping his h  
caressingly down her arm. "You know the reason  
don't get over. It ain't my fault; I always gets the h  
It's Mollie Eastman. She's dead—no pep. When  
comes on with her 'so long Mary' face, what happ  
Everything's down. She's got a voice, but she w  
fire up."

"That's right. Pass the buck to Mollie. It's just  
you guys."

## VIRTUE

"Come on, Adele; listen to reason. Won't you? You know me and you can put over a swell act."

"What's going to become of Mollie?" asked Adele, unhooking her waist. "She ain't none too well, an' there's that kid o' hers. She can't afford to lay off until she teams up with some one else. An', for that matter, I can't lose no time rehearsing a new act myself."

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed Mills. "Mollie ain't nothin' to me and I ain't nothin' to her. There 'ain't never been anything between us, an'—"

"I guess it ain't your fault," interrupted the singer.

"Cut that stuff, Adele. I ain't married to her, an' I ain't under no contract to look after her future. I'm closin' the act, anyway. You 'ain't got nothin' on to-night, have you? Let's make a date for after the show and talk this thing over. What d'ye say?"

"All right, Tom. I'll take you up. Meet me out in front."

"Why out in front?"

"Because I gotta duck a 'john' what waits for me every night."

"Has he got any dough?"

"I don't know—yet. But he's got an automobile, an' that saves me car fare. I'm stalling him along—to see if I can get the price of a new drop out of him. The one I got is gettin' cheesey; looks like a bale o' rags when you're close up to it."

"Bring him along an' we'll try an' swing him to back the new act," advised Mills.

"Not likely," replied Adele. "Leave him to me. You'd scare him off the first rap out o' the box. Why, the poor guy's nutty about me. Don't wake him up."

"All right, kid; out in front it is."

As Adele disappeared into her "two by four" dressing

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

room, Tom Mills started to follow her, then, changing his mind, paused, and crossed back stage until he came to a door marked "No. 5." He opened it without knocking, and entered.

Seated in front of a dirty, cracked mirror, carefully powdering away the dark rings from under her big blue eyes, was Mollie Eastman, the other half of the Mills & Eastman act.

Without her make-up, she appeared about twenty-five years old. Her hair was jet black and wavy. She was medium tall, slight in build, and perfectly formed. When made up, with the lines of care and worry artistically clogged with grease paint and frosted with powder, and a slight glow of rouge on her cheeks, she easily passed for carefree twenty.

Sleeping in a chair on her right was a little girl, three years old. Her head was tenderly pillowed on a woman's cloak, and a newspaper was so arranged that the light from the electric bulbs on the sides of the mirror was carefully shaded from her eyes. The happy look on her sleeping face indicated she had the tender care of a devoted mother.

When the door opened and Tom Mills entered, Mollie, with a startled air, reached for a shawl and drew it around her bare shoulders. Her act did not escape him.

"You don't have to cover up," he remarked, sneeringly. "I ain't goin' to eat you."

Purposely ignoring his remark and sneer, with a finger on her lips, she pointed in the direction of the sleeping child. "Tom, please do not wake her up," she pleaded. "The poor child is tired out."

"Why don't you leave the brat home?" he brutally replied. "A theater's no place for a kid; it's only in the way."

## VIRTUE

Mollie forced back her resentment, but the tears were threatening to overflow and spoil her make-up. "You know I cannot leave her in that terrible house where I live. Why, I couldn't go through the act with the thought of my little Mollie all alone!"

"Well, then, why don't you stick her in some institution that takes care of kids?" said Mills. "That's what they pay the city taxes for. It's—"

"We will not discuss the matter any further." As Mollie said this her eyes narrowed and a hard look overspread her beautiful face—a look of warning, which did not go unheeded by her partner.

His gaze dropped before hers as it had done many times before—he was afraid of that look.

"Well, there's no use gettin' sore about it. I didn't mean nothin'." Then, in a half-pleading, half-whining voice, he continued: "Why don't you listen to reason, Mollie? Forget your high-brow stuff. You know me and you can team up. I'm dead gone on you, an' later on I can get a divorce an' we can get married—if *you insist on it*. The wife's out on the Coast an' she'll never get wise. An' supposin' she does, what's the odds?"

At his insult the red blood mounted to her forehead and she slowly approached him. He seemed transfixed by her gaze and stood motionless. She drew back her right arm and with all her force slapped him squarely in the face. He recoiled from the blow, then, leaning forward, drew his closed fist back as if to strike her; but she did not move, just looked him in the eyes. His arm dropped to his side, his fist opened, and without a word he turned and left the room.

As he walked away from the dressing room Adele Murphy quickly stepped out of sight behind a piece of scenery. Evidently she had been eavesdropping.

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Mollie, the tears pouring down her face, stooped and kissed her still sleeping baby; then, with a sigh of resignation, sat down before the mirror and commenced all over with her make-up.

Tom Mills entered his dressing room, which he shared with a member of another act, and retouched his make-up, which had been spoiled by Mollie's blow. He appeared to take the occurrence as a matter of course. After carefully removing all traces of the damage, he turned to his companion, who was an interested onlooker.

"Say, Ed," he remarked, "take a tip from me and lay off a 'jane' with a temper. They 'ain't got no reasoning power. I just puts up a proposition to Mollie which any other skirt would 'a' jumped at, but not her; she hauls off and comes me one on the jaw. Can you beat it?"

Ed, before answering, inhaled deeply from his cigarette, then blew the smoke carefully out of the open window to leave no evidence of his violation of the fire regulations.

"They all got tempers," he volunteered. "I've had three of 'em in the last thirteen months, an' treated all of 'em white, too, but sooner or later off goes the safety valve. You just got to put up with 'em, that's all—just overlook it. There goes your call, Tom. Now make up to her, like a nice boy, and she'll be eatin' outa your hand before the night's over."

"Yes, she will—like hell!" muttered Tom, as he left to meet Mollie in the wings for their turn.

Mills & Eastman met with about the same reception from the audience that Dublin's Sweetest Songstress had received.

Finishing her turn, Mollie returned to her dressing room. The audience's lack of enthusiasm did not worry her. She was used to it.

## VIRTUE

Pretty soon Mills opened her door, took out some money, counted it, and, with a hang-dog look, placed it on her dressing shelf. "There's forty-three bucks. It's all that's comin' to you," he said. "I took out what I advanced as your share on the drop. This act closes to-night, so you can get out and hustle for a job. I'm through with you. If you'd o' been a sport an' listened to reason, instead of flyin' off the handle, we could o' got a nice little apartment an' everything would o' been jake. As it is, I'm teamin' up with a live wire. Me an' Adele Murphy's goin' to do doubles, an' that goes for on an' off, too. Get me? Say, that skirt knows where her bread's buttered, all right! There's your jack on the shelf, an' you an your brat can go plumb to hell; an' some day when you wants somethin' to eat, come around to the back door an' I'll slip you a sandwich—maybe!"

While Mills was talking, Mollie, completely ignoring him, picked up the money, packed her make-up box, and put her few belongings into a cheap suitcase.

"I expected nothing more from you," she replied. "Now get out of here!"

He needed no second invitation.

In front of the theater Adele Murphy was waiting for him.

"Hello, kid! Right on the job!" he sang out, as he approached her. "That's the way to be with me. I likes 'em to be right there *prompt*. How about it? I ditched Mollie in quick time—the Mills and Eastman act is closed for the season. Now it's going to be 'Mills and Murphy.'"

Adele caught him by the lapel of the coat and gently drew him under the arc light. "Listen, dearie. I want to tell you this where I can see your face," she murmured, sweetly. "Yes, it's going to be 'Mills an' Murphy,'"

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

yes it is—*like hell!* Why, you dirty, low-down, tin-horn four-flusher! I overheard the sweet spiel you handed Mollie Eastman in her dressin' room. Why, you crab! Tryin' to give *me* a good time, are you? Well, let me whisper this in your ear, *you just beat it, and beat it quick*, an' if I ever catch you mussin' around Adele Murphy again I'm going to do the world a favor an' give you a sixty-dollar funeral, chapel free; and it's going to be without flowers. Get me? *Without flowers.*"

Finishing her outburst, she went to a yellow car waiting at the curb. Evidently her "john" was on the job.

Tom Mills, dumfounded, stood and watched the car out of sight. "Ed was right; they've all got 'em," he muttered to himself as he walked in the direction of Third Avenue.

When the door of Mollie's dressing room had closed behind Tom Mills she dropped wearily into a chair and gave way to her pent-up emotions. The tears slowly filled her eyes, then, crowding for more space, overflowed into huge drops on her cheeks, and were soon followed by choking sobs.

Baby Mollie, awakened by her mother's sobbing, rubbed her eyes with her pudgy fists in an endeavor to speed the retreating sandman. Then, moving her head out of the protecting shadow of the newspaper, she blinked in the hard glare of the electric lights. She got down from the chair and crossed over to her mother and gently lifted her head.

"Don't cry, muvver. Mollie loves oo," she lisped.

Mollie's arm stole around her child and drew her closer. Then, stifling her sobs, she raised the child's face tenderly until her blue eyes looked into hers. "God be good to you, child," she whispered, "because in this world you will need His kindness."

## VIRTUE

Little Mollie, with a puzzled air, returned her look. "Muvver—has Dod been bad to oo?" she asked. "Did He make oo cry?"

"God is everything that is good, sweetheart," answered the mother, with a smile like a ray of sunshine on a wet meadow. "He is never bad to anyone. He takes care of us all."

"But, muvver, Dod took papa away from oo," protested the child. "Papa is wif Dod. Ain't he, muvver?"

"Yes, dear, papa is with God."

"Is Dod mad at papa?"

"Of course not, dear. What makes you ask that?"

"Papa wouldn't make oo cry, would he, muvver?"

"No, dear."

"Den Dod is mad at papa, because Dod made oo cry."

"No, child, God did not make me cry. Don't worry your little head any more. Mother is going to take you home."

"Muvver, who is Dod Dam?"

"Hush, child! You mustn't say that. It is naughty. Who did you hear say such a naughty thing?"

"Mr. Mills said virtoo was a Dod Dam nuisance."

"Hush, Mollie dear; mother does not want you to listen to such things. Mr. Mills didn't know what he was saying."

"Who is Virtoo, muvver?"

"You are too young to understand, dear. When you are older I will explain it to you. Now let's get our things together and go home. My little dear is sleepy and so is mother."

Just then the doorman knocked on the door and in a gruff voice informed that he "wouldn't be waitin' around all night for a lot o' ham actors."

Mollie gathered her things together, put out the lights,



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

then, with the suitcase in her right hand and bending under the weight of sleepy little Mollie in her arm, she left the theater to go to her back room on the fourth floor of a cheap boarding house for actors in Twenty-eighth Street.

Walking a few blocks, her strength commenced to fail; the weight of little Mollie and the suitcase were too much for her. She stopped to rest and this woke the baby, who began to cry. In desperation she hailed a passing taxi, although she could ill afford the money; still, it was better than having her little one suffer.

At her boarding house she found the front stoop crowded, it being too hot in the close, stuffy rooms for the roomers to sleep. The landlady was waiting to inform her that two weeks' rent was due, so as Mollie picked her way through the boarders she smiled and said:

"I'll be right upstairs to see you, dearie."

She was true to her word, because Mollie had no sooner removed her things than there sounded a knock on the door, and in answer to her "Come in" the landlady entered.

"Mr. Stein just told me you and Mills split up and that your act is closed," she said. "Of course it makes no difference to me, but I've promised your room to a gentleman; he has been in several times and has offered me two dollars more than you pay for it. And, of course, dearie, you know in these hard times two dollars is two dollars, and everyone has to look out for themselves. Also, you cook in here, and the baby's cryin' annoys the other roomers. It ain't your fault, Mrs. Eastman, but you know what people are—they *just will kick*. I hope you have the money for the two weeks you owe me, and I am very sorry, but I must insist you pay in advance if you intend to stay, because you know how uncertain the

## VIRTUE

show business is, especially right now, when everything's so dull—and my bills must be met."

Mollie counted out some money, and with a sigh handed it to her. "I am sorry, but I guess I'll have to leave to-morrow," she answered, "because until I can get something to do I'll not be able to afford this room."

"If you're goin' to leave to-morrow," replied the landlady, with a hard look, "you owe a dollar and a half more, because your two weeks was up this morning."

"You do not mean you are going to charge me a dollar and a half for sleeping in the room to-night?" inquired Mollie, indignantly.

"That's just what I mean," snapped the woman. "If you can afford to roll home in a taxi you can afford to pay what's coming to me. Nobody's beggin' you to stay; you can get out right now if you don't like it; but if you *do* stay, it's a 'bone' and a half in advance."

Mollie pressed her lips together, forcing back an angry reply, then, crossing to her bureau, she counted out some change and handed it to the woman. "Here it is. You can have your room to-morrow," she answered.

"Thank you, dearie," replied the landlady, counting the money. "I hope you hold nothing against me."

After undressing little Mollie and putting her to bed the mother cried herself to sleep.

On Riverside Drive a yellow car drew up in front of a pretentious apartment, and "Adele Murphy, Dublin's Sweetest Songstress," *knew* her "john" had dough, and the prospects for a new drop which did not look like a "bale of rags," loomed brighter.

Perhaps Tom Mills was right and "*virtue was a Dod dam nuisance.*"

## II

### THE EAST SIDE

**T**HE next morning Mollie was up bright and early, and after a frugal breakfast packed her belongings, preparatory to starting her search for rooms. The future loomed dark. At the best, her money would not last longer than a couple of weeks. She would have to get something to do in that time, or—well, she didn't care for herself, but her dear little Mollie should not suffer, no matter what the sacrifice.

To make matters worse, it was raining, but there was one bright spot, however; the landlady had somewhat relented and had given her consent for her to leave her trunk in the lower hall without charge, provided she got it out the next day.

After tramping through the rain for three hours, Mollie decided she would have to go farther east to get a room she could afford. At last, tired out and desperate, she came to No. — East Twelfth Street, between Second and Third Avenues, where a dirty cardboard sign in a wooden frame stated: "Furnished Room to Let. Ring bell three times."

She complied with the sign's instructions, and after pulling on a knob three times a sharp clicking at the front door warned her that some one upstairs was pressing the button for her to enter.

As she pushed the door open a strong smell of onions,

## THE EAST SIDE

mingled with the steam of boiling clothes, proclaimed it was Monday and near dinner time. The hall was damp and gloomy, and she had to grope her way to the staircase. From out of the darkness above came a shrill voice:

"Who is it?"

"I want to look at your furnished room, please," answered Mollie, timidly.

"Well, you'll never see it down there," replied the voice. "Close that front door. 'Ain't you got no sense, lettin' the rain in that way?"

She hesitated, undecided whether to retreat or to advance.

"Muvver, I'm so tired," wailed the little one.

Stooping, Mollie kissed the child and, lifting her in her arms, commenced climbing the two flights of dark stairs. She had not reached the first landing when the voice above warned:

"Mind the bucket at the head o' the stairs."

It took a lot of courage for her to proceed, but she was desperate, so, summoning her reserve strength and nerve, she "minded the bucket" and commenced on the second flight. By this time her eyes were becoming accustomed to the dim light and objects loomed clearer. At the head of the stairs a woman, with sleeves rolled up, was wiping her hands on a blue apron while waiting for her. One thing about her appealed to Mollie—she was *clean*.

"Nothin' doing! No kids!" the woman exclaimed, catching sight of the child in her arms.

Mollie, out of breath from her climb, was heartbroken at her ultimatum. Perhaps her feelings were reflected in her eyes, because the woman, in a kindlier tone, added:

"Well, anyway, it won't hurt to talk it over. Come on in, but look out for that washin'; it's still wet. This rain's queered *me*, all right; this was my day for the roof, an'

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

it up an' rains. Wait till the old man comes home to-night, with that wet washin' in the kitchen; jest wait, that's all."

Mollie entered the kitchen while the woman, Mrs. Henderson by name, looked her up and down and then invited her to be seated.

"In the first place, there ain't no cigarette smokin' allowed in that room," she said, in a decisive voice. "We had a fire last year, an' I ain't runnin' no risks, 'cause I ain't insured."

Mollie assured her she didn't smoke, but Mrs. Henderson paid no attention.

"The room's worth two and a half a week," she continued, "but I'll let it out for two—payable in advance."

Mollie's spirits rose. Two dollars a week! It was the best news she had heard in a long time. She was beginning to like Mrs. Henderson.

"Is that kid yours?" continued the woman with her cross-examination. "I mean is it legitimate? That is, is its father your husband?"

Mollie asserted indignantly that her child was legitimate, but it had no effect on her questioner, who kept right on:

"I guess it don't matter who its father is, or was. It ain't the kid's fault, nohow. But there's one thing about this room that I ain't goin' to stand for, remember now—nix on bringin' men up here. Get me? Nothin' doin' on the men, an' that goes. The last woman who had the room nearly got us all pinched, an' if it hadn't been for my old man knowin' them down at the Three-hundred-and-eighty-ninth Precinct, I'd o' been jugged all right."

Mollie convinced her that she would bring no men into her room.

"Somehow or other, you look different," Mrs. Hender-

## THE EAST SIDE

son said, after a critical survey. "I guess you're all right—if you pay me the dough on time. Remember, now, no backslidin' with the rent. The room is yours if you want it. Come on; I'll show it to you. It's across the hall."

Following in her wake, Mollie entered her new home, and upon first sight a sigh of relief escaped her. It was clean and neatly furnished. Though not large, still she pictured how cozy she could make it with her few knick-knacks and a touch here and there.

Mrs. Henderson was agreeably surprised when Mollie paid her three weeks in advance, but it made her suspicious. "Now remember, no men in that room," she warned, before accepting the money. "If I catch one in there, advance or no advance, out you go."

Mollie assured her that she could have the room and the money, too, if she caught a man in the room. She then asked if she could have her trunk sent up right away.

"A trunk!" exclaimed the woman, in amazement, putting her hands on her hips. "Have you got a trunk? I'm sure in luck—a real roomer at last. Send it up? *Well, I guess!* The sooner the better; but listen, my dear. Keep your room locked, because the people in this house, although I ain't accusin' them of bein' dishonest—still, things has a habit of disappearin'. Now that we knows each other, come into the kitchen and get them wet things dried. You're shiverin' like a leaf, an' I don't want you sick on my hands. I got enough trouble as it is."

Mollie followed her across the hall into the kitchen. She was beginning to feel at home. Mrs. Henderson made some tea, and before many minutes had passed a friendship was being cemented which was to stand a greater test than most friendships do.

Mrs. Henderson was of the East Side, but not of the

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

East Side of filth and crime, but of the East Side that struggles through the mire because mire is there and is unavoidable and must be struggled through. She had no objective in life, but reasoned that somewhere there was a pinnacle to be reached, but she had lost her sense of direction. She was in a sea of mud, and realized she must keep on struggling and fighting, even though knowing in her heart that eventually she must go down, still struggling, as her parents before her had gone down. She was groping for the light that never comes.

In Mollie she saw some one who was different. She saw one who had not struggled through the mud of life, but one who had wandered aimlessly until, approaching the brink of the mud pool, had accidentally slipped and been drawn down by the mire, there to begin the hopeless struggle. She pitied Mollie; her heart went out to her; but, with the distrust and caution caused by her fight, she was afraid to betray to her this pity, this affection. In her eyes it was an evidence of weakness, something to be carefully hidden.

Mrs. Henderson finished her cup of tea, wiped her mouth with the back of her hand, and stared at Mollie.

"It ain't none o' my business," she said, "but don't you think the kid should take off its shoes? The first thing you know it 'll be laid up with the croup, an' I can't have no coughin' kid around here, disturbin' my old man at his writin', 'cause when he do start, an' that ain't very often, worse luck, he don't like no noise around."

With a grateful look Mollie commenced to undo the little one's shoes, but Mrs. Henderson, clearing her throat, said, in a voice verging on bashfulness:

"I ain't much at handlin' kids, having never had none of my own (you see, the old man says they're in the way;

## THE EAST SIDE

guess it's the reason we 'ain't had none), but I kin undo them shoes while you take the can an' run down to Brady's on the corner, like a dear, an' get a pint o' lager an' ale. I'm so thirsty I'm spittin' cotton." Then, misunderstanding Mollie's look of apprehension at the thought of going into a saloon and asking for beer, she said, in a hard voice: "Don't get worried. I ain't askin' you to pay for it. There's a dime on the shelf, but if it comes to that it's an even break if you do cough up, what with tea costin' thirty cents a pound."

"Please don't misunderstand me!" exclaimed Mollie, flushing red at Mrs. Henderson's insinuation. "I was not thinking of the money, but I have never been in a saloon in my life. I would not know how to act. I—"

"Can that stuff!" interrupted the other, in a sarcastic voice. "Now look here; you'd just as well put the cards on the table an' be on the level with me. I ain't askin' questions as to who you are nor where you come from, am I? No. Then don't come none of that on me. 'Ain't never been in a saloon before! Then yer education's been sadly neglected. Well, you don't go into Brady's swingin' door; you go to the family entrance an' stick your can through the window, an' tell him it's lager an' ale for Mrs. Henderson, an' to fill it up."

Though inwardly quaking, Mollie assumed a brave air and, getting the can from the window by the sink, started on her errand.

"I guess you're right, my dear," called Mrs. Henderson, as she stepped into the hall. "You 'ain't never been for a pint before. Come back here a minute and listen. Always rinse the can out, and take a newspaper—like this. Give me the can. See how it goes?" Saying this, she took the can from Mollie, and with an expert turn of the hand, acquired by long practice, showed her how easy it



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

was to hide the can with a newspaper covering. Now try it yourself," she said, handing back the can.

After several failures, Mollie gave up in despair. Mrs. Henderson, with a superior air, took the can from her and rinsed it out in the sink. "It takes practice, but it 'll come easy after a while," she consoled. "Never mind the paper; just stick it under your coat if you don't want nobody to see you rushin' the growler. When you go out, leave the hall door on the crack; it 'll save you pullin' the bell in the rain."

When the door closed behind Mollie, the little one, who had been an interested spectator during the dialogue, looked frightened; but Mrs. Henderson, first making sure that Mollie was gone, patted her on the head. "Mother is comin' right back, sweetheart," she said, in a soft voice which would have astonished her neighbors, had they heard it. "Now, let me undo them shoes."

Little Mollie, with a child's intuition, climbed into her lap and stuck out a dainty foot. "I love my muvver," she cooed, "an' I love oo, too."

Mrs. Henderson stared at the child and bit her lip; it was something new in her life, this child affection. "And I love you, too," she whispered into the little one's ear.

As she said this two big tears rolled down her cheeks. Hurriedly wiping them away with her sleeve, she kissed Mollie on the forehead, and then, in great confusion at her weakness, fumbled with the buttons on her shoe. Removing the shoes, she pulled off the stockings, and with a towel rubbed the little feet until they glowed.

When Mollie closed the door behind her her courage dropped to zero. Going into a saloon and asking for beer mounted as an impossible task; she just could not do it. What should she do? Go back and lose Mrs. Henderson's respect? No, she could not afford to. Perhaps

## THE EAST SIDE

when she reached the street her courage would return; so she groped her way timidly down the dark and evil-smelling stairs. Reaching the second landing, unconsciously she started to tiptoe. It seemed to help her. Holding her breath, she came to the next flight, when suddenly, from a dimly lighted corner, a cat brushed by and with leaps and bounds disappeared down the steps in front of her. With a loud, "Oh!" she threw up her hands in fright, letting loose the can, which bumped and rolled down the stairs, making an unearthly din. She stood paralyzed. A door in the hall opened.

"Johnny, come in here this minute," shrilled a woman's voice, almost in her ear. "D'ye hear me talkin' to you?"

No answer. Mollie, her teeth chattering, pressed against the banister.

"Don't let me go after you," threatened the voice, in an angry tone, "'cause if I do you'll get the hidin' of your sweet life. I see you there against the rail. Come here."

"It isn't Johnny, ma'am. It's—it's me," stammered Mollie, timidly, her heart hammering in her breast.

"Who in hell's me?" inquired the hard voice, suspiciously.

"Mollie Eastman!"

At this answer the door slammed, and Mollie, with a sigh of relief, darted down the stairs. Lying on the bottom step was the precious can. She picked it up and went into the street.

### III

#### JOHNNY MULDOON

IT had stopped raining, and as Mollie paused, uncertain which way to go, a boy of twelve, with school books under his arm, came down the street, whistling a popular air. Seeing Mollie, he stopped and, cocking his head to one side, eyed her up and down. "You can take it from me," he ejaculated, in approval, "she's *some* jane!"

Mollie smiled at him.

"What! Trying to vamp me!" he exclaimed, winking at her, while a broad grin spread over his countenance, "and we 'ain't never been properly interdooced."

"Little boy, can you tell me where Brady's saloon is?" she asked, smiling, although a trifle nonplused at his remark.

"Little boy!" he replied, disgustedly. "Good night! Why don't you call me *Percy* an' be done with it? Do I know where Brady's saloon is? No, I don't know! I only make four trips a day, an' when the ol' man gets a *real* thirst up, I meets myself comin' back."

"Please, *Percy*, where is Brady's?" she implored.

"*Percy!*—*Percy!*" he exclaimed, indignantly. "Well, for callin' me that you can go an' find Brady's." With this remark he stuck his thumb to his nose, opened the front door, and shouted back at her: "*Percy!* You poor simp, me name ain't *Percy*; it's *Johnny*—J-o-h-n-n-y, *Johnny*, with *Muldoon* a-followin' it up." But, relenting, he

## JOHNNY MULDOON

added, "Go down to First Avenoo, turn to your left, an' one block over is Brady's." The door banged and he disappeared.

Her tilt with Johnny somewhat restored her courage, and with a bold front she went in the direction as laid down by him. Arriving at Brady's, she followed Mrs. Henderson's instructions. It was absurdly easy. "Ten cents' worth of beer," she ordered, in her bravest voice, pushing the can through the little box-office window, "and, if you please, some ale."

"Whata you want, light or dark?" asked an Italian porter, taking the can and staring insolently through the window at her.

"Light," she answered, desperately, trusting to luck.

It was the first time in months that she had guessed right. Hiding the can under her coat, with a happy heart and light step she started home. The sidewalk seemed to glide under her feet. She was happy and self-confident. She, Mollie Eastman, had won a victory over self-consciousness.

Arriving at the floor where she had dropped the can, she heard a voice which sounded strangely familiar, arguing in a loud but pleading tone: "I tell you, mom, if you hit me with that stick again I'm goin' to pull out. I 'ain't done nothin' an' I'm always gettin' a beatin' fer doin' it. Ouch! Just hit me again an' I'm gone. Aw—please, mom, have a heart—"

She could not bear to listen further. With a heart full of pity for Johnny Muldoon, she ran up the stairs on tip-toes and quietly opened Mrs. Henderson's door. Her face lighted with a radiant smile at what she saw.

Sitting in front of the stove, with little Mollie in her lap, was Mrs. Henderson. She was crooning a lullaby. Mollie stood still, her heart filled with joy. Suddenly Mrs.

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Henderson turned around and, seeing her, a guilty look overspread her face. She put the child down quickly and rose to her feet.

"Where'd you go fer that pint—to Canarsie?" she demanded, her face scarlet with embarrassment. "I thought you'd pulled out, an' if it hadn't been for payin' me the six dollars in advance, I'd o' turned the kid over to the police, a-thinkin' that—"

"Oh no, you wouldn't," interrupted Mollie, gayly. "You're too good a woman for that." Then she went to Mrs. Henderson and, placing her arm around her waist, kissed her. *Mrs. Henderson returned the kiss.*

In great confusion, the older woman walked away, wiping her eyes with her apron. Then, turning around, she noticed the can of beer in Mollie's hand. "Well, believe me, Mollie," she laughed—"yes, the little dear told me your name—you're some juggler; never spilled a drop. Get that glass over the sink and we'll have one on Brady, an' then it's gettin' supper ready fer the old man, an' fer me, an' fer *you* an' the *kid*."

Mollie was supremely happy. At last she had found understanding and sympathy, what she had been pining for since the time her husband had died, leaving her penniless, with a year-old baby, a passable voice, and a talent for dancing. Through the efforts of some theatrical friends she had been given a "tryout" before a booking agency, and had made good to the extent of working in "small time" vaudeville. Ill luck had dogged her footsteps until, nearly worn out from hard work and worry, she was given a chance to go into an act with Tom Mills. For the first few months the sun shone, but it did not last, because she soon learned, as many before her had learned, that "working double" with Tom Mills had two meanings. For her baby's sake she had put up

## JOHNNY MULDOON

with many insults and insinuations, though always keeping him at arm's length, until the break came at Weber's Vaudeville House.

Mrs. Henderson, humming to herself, was busily engaged clearing the table. Baby Mollie had fallen asleep on the old, broken-down sofa. Mollie, sitting next to her, was peeling potatoes, but frequently paused to stoop over and kiss her child. Mrs. Henderson, out of the corner of her eye, was watching her devotion, and her heart was aching to go over and fondle the little one, but she had not yet thawed out completely. She reasoned that it would never do to surrender too quickly in front of the mother. There would be plenty of time when the child was alone. Nevertheless, she assumed an indignant air and crossed over to Mollie.

"If you 'ain't had no experience rushin' the growler," she said, "I guess you 'ain't had much experience with kids. Go into the bedroom an' get the cover offin the bed an' put it over the kid. First thing you know she's goin' to ketch cold, an' then, good night."

Mollie, with a happy smile, did as directed, but Mrs. Henderson, in an impatient manner, jerked the quilt from her and tucked it carefully about the child's neck.

Each time her fingers came in contact with the soft skin they lingered and stole a sly caress. Mollie, though observing every movement, was diplomatic enough to pretend she did not see. When she had arranged the cover to her satisfaction, Mrs. Henderson went to the ice box to take stock of her larder. There was not much there. The scanty store of food brought her suddenly face to face with grim reality. If her husband did not bring some money home—and she knew, by experience, not to bank on it—it meant there would be a very slim supper that night and little to eat the next day. Her smile disappeared

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

and was replaced by the old hard lines. She sighed, and her eyes assumed that hopeless, despairing look a mouse must have when it falls into a bucket of water and, after swimming in circles, gradually realizes it will live just so long as its fast-tiring muscles will stand the strain. Who were these strangers that she had to feed them? What did they mean to her? Their six dollars had to go for rent. There was no arguing with the landlord. Past experience of seeing families ejected, and their belongings thrown out on the sidewalk, proved this.

Perhaps Mollie guessed what was in her mind, because, stealing up behind her, she put her arm around her waist. "Of course, Mrs. Henderson, you know I will go halves on the food. I have a few dollars left, and if you need them I will gladly lend them to you. To-morrow I'll look for work, and, if I'm lucky, it won't be long before everything will be sunshine."

Greatly surprised, Mrs. Henderson gently disengaged Mollie's arm and leaned against the sink. "Supposin' you don't get work?" she queried, seriously. "What then? You know there's plenty of jobs when yer workin' an' don't need 'em, but when you're on the bum an' needs 'em, they're scarcer than fleas on a goldfish. You up an' loans me some money. What happens? You don't hook up with a job, an' then it's up to me to feed you and the kid forever and ever, amen! Nix. I ain't a-gamblin' that way, because if yer lookin' for luck on the East Side, you'll go blind, 'cause it ain't there."

"Mrs. Henderson," returned Mollie, earnestly, "whether you believe me or not, I trust and respect you. In fact, I am beginning to love you, and I know little Mollie does already. No matter what happens, I'll always be your friend, and I want you for a friend, too. I don't want to be just your roomer. I'm lonely. I want some

## JOHNNY MULDOON

one to love me—to love my child. I want a home. I—I—I'm tired—”

Her voice broke, and, going to Mrs. Henderson, she rested her head on her shoulder and sobbed as if her heart were breaking.

“Come, now. Don't make a fool outen yourself!” exclaimed the elder woman, in an effort to disguise her true feelings. “Supposin' I started to blubber, wouldn't it be an awful mess? I don't know whether you're kiddin' me or not, but I'm goin' to take a chance on you—why, I don't know; guess it's because I likes you an' the kid. So cut out the wet stuff; we'll team up an' go to the poor-house together. I always likes company. Here's me hand,—let's shake an' call it a deal?”

She slipped her hand into Mollie's and the squeeze she received meant far more than anything that could have been said.

Both women immediately busied themselves with setting the table. They did not dare to look each other in the eyes. Mrs. Henderson, in her nervousness, knocked the half-filled can accidentally from the shelf and the beer was emptied into the pan holding the peeled potatoes. The accident, which ordinarily would have caused her to swear, made her break into a nervous, but uproarious, laugh. Mollie promptly joined in, and the two of them, leaning against the sink, laughed until the tears rolled down their faces. The tension was broken and they were friends forever.

Still laughing, Mrs. Henderson rinsed off the potatoes and returned the empty can to its place. “Wait 'll you see,” she said; “the old man is goin' to ask for more of them spuds on account of their flavor.” Her remark started them both off again.

Suddenly Mrs. Henderson exclaimed, looking at the ninety-five-cent alarm clock on the kitchen shelf: “Good



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

night! it's a quarter to six an' I've forgot the meat. Let me have a dollar, Mollie dear, an' I'll call Johnny Muldoon an' send him to the butcher's for some chuck steak."

While Mollie was getting the money from her purse Mrs. Henderson went into the hall and called down the stairs, "Johnny!—Johnny Muldoon!"

A door opened on the next floor, a slight struggle, and our young friend Johnny came running up the stairs.

"Come into the kitchen a minute," ordered Mrs. Henderson, looking closely at his face. She drew him over to the window; then, putting her hand under his chin, she tilted his face upward so she could get a better view of it. Over his right eye was an ugly bruise which had been recently administered. "What is it this time, Johnny?" she asked, her mouth tightening.

His lips trembled, but with a brave effort he swallowed the lump in his throat and answered in an unsteady voice: "Aw, it ain't nothin'. I ran into the—"

"Now, don't lie, Johnny," she interrupted. "Is she at it again?"

He nodded his head in shame, but, in defense of the only one he held dear in life, he said, in a defiant tone: "Mom's on the hard stuff again, but it ain't her fault. Pop goes on a drunk last night an' spends all his dough, an' when mom asks him fer some kale he hauls off an' hits her an' pulls his freight for Brady's. Mom's got to hit some one, so I gets it. I ain't kickin', 'cause when she's sober she's good to me. But some day I'm goin' to kill pop, even if I swings for it. He ain't no good, the big bum."

Mollie, in horror, listened to Johnny's story and was going to speak, but Mrs. Henderson put her fingers to her lips and slowly shook her head for silence.

"Run down to the butcher's, Johnny," she instructed,

## JOHNNY MULDOON

handing him the dollar, "and tell that Dutchman to give me a pound o' chuck steak, an' to put a piece of suet in with it—" Pausing, she bit her lip, looked in Mollie's direction, and then back at Johnny, and resumed: "I guess you'd better make it two pounds; and step over to Dago Joe's an' get four ripe tomatoes, an' see that they're ripe—not too soft, though. Tell Joe they're fer Mrs. Henderson. Then go over to the delicatessen an' get a quart of milk—an' look at the bottle and see that it 'ain't been opened. Now, hurry up."

Although listening intently, Johnny was staring at the baby on the couch. Then he looked from the baby to Mollie, at the same time nodding his head in a wise way, as if he understood the whole situation. But as soon as Mrs. Henderson had finished speaking he opened the door and was gone, but not before he caught the admonition hurled after him, "Don't forget to count your change this time, an' don't let there be any dimes shy."

When Johnny had gone, Mollie asked Mrs. Henderson if what he had said about his father and mother were true, and if something could not be done to help them.

"Mollie, listen to a good tip," counseled the elder woman. "Never butt into family affairs on the East Side. It 'll get you into trouble. The only one who can help Johnny is the good Lord, an' He's generally busy when you need Him."

Mollie's eyes opened in horror at this sacrilegious remark, but she did not reply. Perhaps the many hard knocks Mrs. Henderson had received during her life had weakened her faith.

"I guess you thought I had a nerve orderin' two pounds o' steak," gloomed Mrs. Henderson, not noticing Mollie's look, "but I knows that kid 'ain't had no dinner, an' his chances for supper is mighty slim, what with his mother

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

an' father boozed up. But Johnny's feed is on me. I'll pay you back."

Mollie, in reply, patted her on the shoulder and smiled. They understood each other, only, Mrs. Henderson liked to test out the understanding in words. It was a new and exquisite pleasure to her.

In a short time Johnny returned and, laying his parcels and the change on the table, started to leave. Mrs. Henderson let him reach the door. "When you smell the steak cookin' come up an' have your supper," she invited.

Johnny grinned, and, with a snappy, "Yes, ma'am," was gone.

Mrs. Henderson watched the clock nervously, as if expecting an unwelcome visitor. She would bite her lips and half turn in Mollie's direction, then, changing her mind, would carry on with her preparations for supper. Finally a look at the clock decided her.

"It's pretty near time fer the old man to get home," she said. "When he comes in don't mind him if he acts queer. He's harmless. Just don't notice nothin' he does. You know he's 'snowbound.'" At Mollie's look of wonder she explained. "'Snowbound' means he sniffs coke, takes cocaine through his nose. He can't help it, poor man. He gets such terrible headaches he nearly goes crazy, an' he takes the dope to ease the pain; but it's gotten to be a habit. When he's out o' the stuff he goes on somethin' terrible, but when he's coked up it's a sign of prosperity. It means he's got the dough. He's a newspaper writer an' gets paid by what he calls 'space,' but lots o' times there's a darned long space between pay days. He has to have dope to be able to work, an' he has to have work to be able to get the dope, so it's an even break for him, with me the only loser. But I ain't kickin', because when he's got the coin I gets my share; so when he comes in—"

## JOHNNY MULDOON

The door opened and a man apparently about sixty years of age, but in reality only forty-five, entered the room. He was shaking all over. Without speaking to them, he stumbled over to a chair which was set for him at the table. Sitting, or, rather, drooping into the seat, he stared vacantly around the room. With a convulsive shudder his body inclined forward; then, as if resisting some unseen force, he put his hands weakly on the table in front of him in an effort to brace himself, but to no avail; his head sank lower and lower until buried in his arms.

Mollie, very much frightened, backed away from the table. Without removing her gaze from the pitiful human wreck, she reached the sofa where her child was still sleeping, and with her body tried to shield the little one from the awful example of degraded manhood.

With a look, half disgust and half pity, Mrs. Henderson went to a vase on the kitchen shelf and extracted a two-dollar bill from the rent money. Stepping into the hall, she yelled for Johnny.

Thinking it was notice that supper was ready, Johnny first sniffed the air to ascertain if there were any signs of the odor of cooking beefsteak, but, failing to discover any, he took no chances and came up the stairs at a run.

Mrs. Henderson met him at the door, handed him the bill, and pointed to the reclining figure in the chair. He gave a quick look, and with a nod of understanding disappeared down the stairs. He had been on this errand before.

When he had left, Mrs. Henderson approached Mollie and placed her arm around her. "There ain't nothin' to be scared of," she whispered; "he's harmless. I've sent Johnny for some 'snow.' He's a wise kid an' knows where to get it. A couple o' shots an' you won't know

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

the old man. But it's bad news. If he wasn't broke he wouldn't be in this condition."

The man at the table raised his head slowly and gazed appealingly at Mrs. Henderson, then, twitching nervously, his head dropped back into its reclining position.

"It ain't only the want of dope that makes him this way," Mrs. Henderson apologized to Mollie. "He's got one o' them bad headaches of his'n. It takes the nerve right out of him. He's just like a dish rag—'ain't got no more ambition than a cat."

## IV

### COCAINE

**J**OHNNY ran until he came to a news-stand near Brady's corner. Going up to the man selling papers, he gave him a knowing wink. "Got a last edition, with the racing dope?" he whispered.

The news vender held his hand down by his side and Johnny cautiously slipped him the two-dollar bill. With the money still in his palm, he gave a quick look at the bill to see if the denomination in the corner was the required amount. Then, peering carefully around, he reached for a newspaper from a pile well back on the stand and handed it to Johnny, who accepted it and walked nonchalantly away.

"Yer getting too raw, Jake," warned a policeman, emerging from a doorway where he had witnessed the transaction, "when it comes to passin' it out to kids. Some day the 'Old Man's' going to make a hell of a kick."

"You cops is the limit," retorted Jake, with an ugly scowl. "Nothin' gets by you. Well, Mulvaney, how much is it this time? I'm gettin' damned sick handin' out the graft to everybody. There ain't nothin' left fer me when I gets through wid youse guys."

"Nix on that stuff," answered Mulvaney. "It's the jack or a pinch. Come across. I ain't bleedin' you; just the usual. I ain't hard on nobody."

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Jake, with a sour face, slipped him some money, and the cop commenced walking his beat.

When Johnny reached the lower hall he opened the newspaper and took a small paper envelope from one of its folds. With his finger nail he loosened the seal in such a way that no one would suspect it had been tampered with. Then, holding the envelope by its edge, he tapped it on his palm. A minute stream of white powder sifted into his hand. Carefully, lest he spill some of it, he brought his hand to his nostrils, sniffed several times until the cocaine had disappeared, and then wiped his hand guiltily against his trousers.

Johnny did not realize the gravity of his deed. He was just imitating his elders. Anyway, he was hungry and tired, and this white powder for which the grown-ups paid such a fabulous price was said to be the wonder-healing miracle of the world.

Receiving the little white envelope from Johnny, Mrs. Henderson crossed to her husband and slipped it gently into his trembling hand. With an eager, craving look he almost tore the envelope to pieces in his efforts to get at the contents. Tearing off a corner, he poured some of the white powder on the back of his hand and sniffed it greedily up his nose. Johnny watched him curiously; the next time he would use the back of his hand and do it right. Mr. Henderson rose, and with a much steadier gait disappeared into the bedroom.

Mollie witnessed his performance with curiosity and horror intermixed.

"Well, we won't hear from him no more to-night," volunteered Mrs. Henderson. "He'll just nurse that 'snow,' an' in the mornin' he'll be chipper as a lark, an' without nothin' to eat, neither."

As she put the steak on to cook, Johnny commenced to

## COCAINE

laugh hysterically. Mrs. Henderson regarded him in sympathy. "Poor kid!" she murmured. "The smell o' the steak's makin' him nutty."

But the steak had nothing to do with Johnny's hysteria, because when he sat down to supper it was all he could do to eat what was placed before him. He felt faint and nauseated. Apparently Mrs. Henderson did not notice his lack of appetite, because she put the piece of steak originally intended for Mr. Henderson on his plate.

Johnny, in a plaintive voice, asked if he could take the meat down to his mom, saying she had not eaten for two days. Mrs. Henderson got a plate, put the steak on it, added a potato and two slices of bread, and gave it to Johnny, who took it downstairs to his mom.

Opening the door of his "home" and holding the plate of food in front of him as a peace offering, in case his prolonged absence should be met with a violent request for information as to where he "had been keepin' himself," he advanced slowly to the center of the dirty room and, like a scout, made a swift but accurate survey of the position. His father was absent, so temporarily he was safe. His mother, sitting at the table, was asleep, with her head resting on her arms.

Approaching her cautiously, he placed the peace offering noiselessly on the table where she would see it when she awoke from her alcoholic stupor.

The next issue to be considered was, had the old man been in? This could be answered easily. Johnny had seen his mother place seventy cents behind the clock on the mantelpiece. If the money were still there, it meant his father had not as yet been home. If it were gone, Johnny was safe, because he knew his father would never overlook an easy bet like seventy cents behind a clock. His mother had put the money there for an "eye-opener"



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

in the morning. He was familiar with her habits—she was always looking out for the morrow.

He lifted the old-fashioned clock carefully. The money was gone. But, to make sure, he looked under every article on the mantel. It was not safe to take a chance. The disappearance of the money temporarily set his mind at ease. The "old man" was at Brady's and would be there until closing time, unless Brady, as sometimes happened, allowed him to sleep off his drunk in the back room of the saloon. If so, he was liable to be away all the next day. Anyway—and Johnny took a certain pride in the fact—Mr. Muldoon was an artist when it came to spreading a few cents through an evening of drinking. He always "horned in" when some "good fellow" was "blowing." So far as politics was concerned, he was nonpartisan. He always agreed with the one who was spending money over the bar. If, after enjoying a few drinks at the other fellow's expense, the conversation lagged and insistent glances were directed at him, he immediately accepted the warning that it was his turn to "blow to a round" or to "blow the party." Invariably he "blew the party," and disappeared until new victims hove in sight.

Johnny turned the gas down low in the kitchen and entered the bedroom. He was drowsy. The dirty, unmade bed appeared as inviting as a king's couch. He smelled perfume. Where did it come from? His head felt light and dizzy, but it was a pleasant dizziness. His troubles commenced to disappear like a lifting fog. He paused, uncertain, and then, tiptoeing noiselessly into the kitchen, gently raised his mother's dirty, rum-bloated face and kissed her good night. To him her swollen face was that of an angel. Far back in the past he remembered a sweet face looking over the cradle's edge into his own;

## COCAINE

the faces were one and the same. Where was his father? Oh yes, he was at Brady's, enjoying himself. Well, he hoped he would have a pleasant time. What was this strange transformation taking place? He actually loved his father, the father whom he had vowed some day to kill.

Caressingly he lifted a stray white lock of his mother's hair and tucked it lovingly behind her ear, and, after another kiss, tiptoed back to his bedroom. He could not understand himself. He was enjoying life. He, Johnny Muldoon, was happy!

Even though in a state of bliss, still, unconsciously, the instinct of self-preservation and caution asserted itself. Before lying down he closed the bedroom door and placed a chair against it in such a manner that no one could enter without making enough noise to wake him.

Many times before this ruse had saved him from a beating from his drunken father; it had warned him in time to make good his exit down the ever-ready fire escape at the window.

Comfort whispered in his ear to remove his shoes and have a good sleep, but Caution tugged at his elbow and insisted it was safer to sleep with them on. For, supposing the ruse of the barricaded door failed to work? It meant he would have to make his retreat in bare feet, and his shoes were new, bought for him by his mother during one of her very far-between generous moods, and new shoes meant money for his father at Goldstein's "hock-shop."

Caution won, and Johnny lay down with his shoes on. Though not asleep, he dreamed of beautiful things. He was in heaven. What had come over him? What had caused the change? Ah, he had it! It was the white powder he had sniffed in the hall. He, Johnny Muldoon,

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

like Mr. Henderson, was "snowbound." The miracle powder was worth every cent paid for it. Mr. Henderson was right. He knew a good thing when he saw it, and in the future Johnny Muldoon was going to be right. He knew where the powder grew. It was a "cinch." With a contented sigh, a happy smile on his face, he turned over and went to sleep.

Mulvaney, the cop, was right. *It was getting too raw when it came to passing it out to kids.*

## V

### BLACKLISTED

THE next morning Mollie was awakened by a knocking at her door. "Who is there?" she inquired, sleepily.

"Where do you think you're at?" replied Mrs. Henderson's cheery voice. "The Waldorf-Astoria? It's nearly eight o'clock, an' if you're goin' to hunt fer a job, it's about time to get busy."

"I'll be up in a minute," answered Mollie, jumping out of bed. Hurriedly washing and dressing, it was only a matter of a few minutes before she and little Mollie were ready for breakfast. Crossing the hall into the kitchen, she apologized for her tardiness, but Mrs. Henderson, busy at the stove, paid no attention to her. Mollie felt hurt, but remained silent.

"I've been thinkin' over what we said last night about goin' partners on this deal," Mrs. Henderson finally volunteered, "an' I still thinks the same as then. But there's somethin' I should tell you, an' here it is. The old man ain't goin' to last long; the snow's got him. I had a hard time with him last night, an' this mornin' it was another two-spot for dope out o' the rent money. Of course he's insured—I've seen to that—but how I'm goin' to meet the payments I don't know. Now here's the proposition. We goes in together. You get a job. I takes care o' the kid, cleans the rooms, an' gets the eats, an' chips in with what I make out o' the washtub and

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

an occasional lift from the old man. You pools yer money with me an' we'll pull together. Is it a go?"

Mollie said it was, and after a very scanty breakfast she kissed little Mollie good-by and started on her rounds of the booking agents. She was light-hearted and full of confidence.

At the first agency she had to wait in the anteroom with several others for about an hour and a half, and then a very much painted Jewish stenographer informed that Mr. Rosenberg had just telephoned he would not be in until "to-morrow, about noon."

The next agency was also crowded with waiting people. Mollie's heart sank as she saw another vexatious delay. Going to the desk, behind which sat a "fresh" office boy making sketches on a piece of paper, she gave him her name and requested that he ask Mr. Short if he would see her a minute.

"Sure I'll take yer name in," replied the boy, with a bored look, "but it won't get you nothin'. You gotta take yer turn. We don't play no favorites in this joint. Have a seat and—wait."

Mollie sat down, a target for the eyes of the rest of the people, while the boy disappeared through a door marked, "Private." He soon reappeared and resumed his sketching.

The door marked "Private" opened, a peroxide blonde emerged and, with a haughty stare at the rest of the waiting people, swept into the hall.

"That's Grace Heller of the Heller sisters," whispered a man sitting beside Mollie. "She must o' landed a forty-week contract for the act. Can't sing a note, but gets away with it. Her kid sister's the real class, butcha gottto give Grace credit fer puttin' it over. But there ain't no use of her bein' so upstage about it. You see, I knew her when she didn't have a—"

## BLACKLISTED

A buzzer sounded. The boy at the desk answered its summons. The people in waiting sat up instinctively, then, fearing they had betrayed their anxiety to the others, tried to assume an air of indifference which fooled no one.

Mollie had resigned herself to a long wait and could scarcely believe her ears when the boy called her name. As she got up the others sank back into their despondent air of patient waiting.

Entering the private office, Mollie glanced around curiously. Seated behind a large mahogany desk was a coarse-looking man who squinted at her over his glasses. Without asking her to be seated, he sized her up and down in an insolent manner, as if he were a judge at some cattle show.

"What's the trouble between you and Tom Mills?" he queried, finishing his scrutiny of her. "He tells me you walked out on him the other night and closed the act. All I want to tell you is that you'll never get another job out of this office, and I'll see you don't get one out of any other office, either."

Mollie tried to expostulate with him, but he silenced her with a wave of his hand. "I don't want to hear any excuses," he sneered. "I've known Tom Mills for years, been pals with him, and I *think* the same way he does. You're blacklisted. Get me? Blacklisted. Now, take a tip from me—it pays to use your brains in this business. Being upstage gets you nowhere. That's all." He motioned toward the door.

Mollie, hardly able to keep from crying, left the room.

When the door closed behind her, Mr. Short rose from his desk, went to another door in the office, and ushered in Tom Mills.

"How was that, Tom?" he asked, with pride. "I put it up straight enough, didn't I? She's a peach, all right,

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

and I don't blame you for trying to make her. I'm pretty well fixed, or I think I'd have a try myself."

"You're there when it comes to handin' out the stuff, Pete," returned Mills, approvingly. "You're there, all right. Don't forget to telephone to Levy and the rest to put her on the list. When she ain't able to land nothin' she'll come whinin' around for her old job, an' then she's got to talk turkey."

"I'll fix the rest all right as far as she's concerned," replied Short; "but take a lead from me, Tom—lay off Adele Murphy. She's a wise kid and you've got to get up early to pull anything on her. There ain't no use gettin' sore 'cause she turned you over, and back lashin' at her 'll only get you in trouble."

Mollie spent the rest of the day tramping from one agency to another, but without success. Tired out and disheartened, she returned home.

For several days she went the rounds of the agencies, but the "black list" was working. She was either just too late or else the old stereotyped phrase greeted her, "Mr. So-and-so says there is nothing in your line to-day, but if you will call again next week perhaps he will be able to do something for you."

At one place she had received an offer of work, but a condition went with it that made it impossible for her to accept and retain her self-respect.

Mollie, to help Mrs. Henderson out with the rent, had pawned two of her costumes, with the hope of getting work in the near future and redeeming them. She had kept this from Mrs. Henderson, because she did not wish to add to that worthy woman's worries.

Things went from bad to worse. Mrs. Henderson contracted rheumatism in her back, and, no matter how bravely she tried, it was an impossibility to continue to

## BLACKLISTED

take in washing. At first she stood over the tub by strength of will alone, but will cannot always conquer physical pain and she had to surrender. Then Mr. Henderson fell ill with pneumonia and had to be removed to the hospital, so there was no hope of financial help from him. It was up to Mollie to carry the whole burden. Without a murmur she bent her shoulders to the task, but she was getting desperate. For a time she tried her hand at washing, but her strength failed and she had to give it up.

The pawn shops had claimed everything pawnable, except for one costume which she saved in case she secured work through one of the agencies. The fact that Mr. Short had told her she was blacklisted had taken the spunk out of her, and many times she had missed work on account of her shyness and self-consciousness.

Once a kindly old Thespian, who had tramped from one office to another without success for over a year, had whispered to her in the waiting room of an agency:

"My dear, talent counts not these days. You must have the front."

Mollie's talent was doubtful, and her "front" was sadly lacking. The end of each unsuccessful day brought her face to face with the inevitable. She was unable to sell her talent and her body she would not sell. Then the thought of little Mollie would spur her on and she would start anew the next day, still relying on her talent.

But each day lessened her chances. Her clothes were becoming shabby and the soles of her shoes were wearing through in spots, so that her stockinged feet touched the ground. And stockings, no matter how carefully darned, cannot stand the wear and tear of city pavements, especially when one is tired and hungry and her feet drag.

More and more rouge had to be applied to the whitening, undernourished cheeks to preserve their city bloom,



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

and the rouge in her box was getting low, so low that even now the bottom of the box was commencing to show through the red.

Then came the worst blow of all. Little Mollie fell sick. A doctor was needed, and there was no money to pay him. And doctors on the East Side have to live and will not always work for charity. True, there were the institution doctors; but Mrs. Henderson had told her, and Mrs. Henderson knew and never lied, that an institution doctor would order her little Mollie away in an ambulance—and God help her if she ever went into a city hospital. Mrs. Henderson had seen too many little ones take that ride—and what had become of them? They were now resting in Potter's Field, buried by the city. And, furthermore, Mrs. Henderson had said perhaps the sickness was contagious, and perhaps the city would put a quarantine on them and she would not be able to even look for work, and then what? Mollie could guess the rest.

The night little Mollie was taken ill they sat all night at her bedside. Mollie prayed throughout her vigil, but Mrs. Henderson, more practical, tenderly cared for the little one. When morning came, Mollie, with breaking heart, again resumed her hopeless search for work. She knew it would end in failure, but still, strengthened by her prayers of the night before, she hoped against hope.

After another fruitless day, although every step was pain, she ran home with beating heart, not knowing whether she would see her little girl alive or dead. Rushing up the stairs, she almost fell into the room. Mrs. Henderson, with a ray of hope in her eyes, which quickly died after a glance at Mollie's face, put her fingers to her lips and warned her not to make a noise, as the little one was sleeping.

## BLACKLISTED

The mother seated herself at the bedside and, holding the hot, feverish hands of the baby, kissed them, and stroked the hot forehead.

Little Mollie opened her eyes slowly and, looking into her mother's face, pleaded with a weak smile, "Muvver don't leave Mollie, 'cause Mollie gets—"

The sentence ended in a spasm of coughing, each racking cough piercing the heart of the mother like a knife.

While the baby was gasping for breath a footstep was heard in the hall. "Why in hell don't you send that damn kid to the hospital?" called a man's rough voice—"keep-in' everybody awake at night?"

Mrs. Henderson's hands doubled into fists and she half rose, but, thinking better of it, resumed her former position. Two hot tears coursed down Mollie's cheeks.

"Don't send me away, muvver," cried the little one, between gasps. "I won't cough no more—"

Mrs. Henderson got up and left the room, while Mollie with a brave effort assured her child the man was only fooling and did not mean what he said.

That night Mollie battled with herself as women before her have battled. She fought until surrounded by overwhelming odds, and then, for her child's sake, surrendered.

The next day she would go out to sell something that was salable. During their breakfast of coffee and bread Mrs. Henderson, with a puzzled air, gazed into Mollie's eyes, then, as if doubting her first survey, she looked again. Mollie said nothing.

"She ain't the same," murmured Mrs. Henderson to herself, shaking her head slowly; "she ain't the same."

Mrs. Henderson was right. A hard look had entered Mollie's eyes. The old Mollie, the night before, had been conquered in an unequal fight, and a new Mollie had been born. No conversation took place between the women as

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Mollie prepared for the street, but Mrs. Henderson watched her closely. Mollie took especial care with her appearance, and, resorting to her make-up box, presently turned to Mrs. Henderson, who gave her one scrutinizing glance—and understood. Mollie knew she understood. The last particles had been scraped from the rouge box, but the desired effect was there.

With one long, lingering kiss she said good-by to her little one and, armed with her woman's weapons, went out to the hunt. She was stalking the easiest and most dangerous of game—man. The game which eventually kills the hunter.

## VI

### EAST OF THIRD AVENUE

A DIFFERENT Mollie walked into Short's Theatrical Agency. "Tell Mr. Short," she said, in a firm voice to the boy at the desk, "that Miss Eastman, formerly with the Mills and Eastman act, wishes to see him right away."

Her tone was so commanding that the boy, before he had overcome his surprise, had delivered the message to "the boss" and was ushering her into the room marked "Private."

As Mollie entered, Mr. Short rose and offered her a chair.

"What can I do for you, Mollie?" he asked, blandly, with an appraising glance.

"I have decided to go back into vaudeville;" then, with a touch of sarcasm in her voice, "and if Mr. Mills wants me, I will be glad to join him."

Pete Short leaned back in his chair, got a cigar from a desk drawer, bit off the end slowly, reached for a match, struck it, and, with an insulting look at Mollie, thought deeply for a few seconds. "Why Tom Mills?" he asked, the burning match still held in his fingers. "There's no real money with him on that circuit. The best it will be is one-night stands and punk hotels in tank towns. What d'you say? Let's go out to lunch and talk this thing over *right*."

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

"Of course, if I can get something better, it suits me," replied Mollie, with assumed carelessness. "I will be very glad to go into details at lunch."

The match in Mr. Short's hand burned down "until the flame touched his fingers. With a muttered "damn" he dropped it, reached for his hat, and, taking Mollie by the arm, pinched her slightly. Her soul revolted at his cheap caress, but her emotion failed to register on her face. It *was* a different Mollie—*outwardly*.

At lunch she was engaged to do a "single," with full pay during rehearsals, and received an advance of fifty dollars to bind the bargain. And that night she was to keep an engagement with her new "manager," which perhaps would keep her out "very late," so she must make arrangements to stay out all night, "if necessary."

Mollie hurried home with her "easily" earned money, and gave it to Mrs. Henderson without comment. Mrs. Henderson accepted it without comment; she understood. But it was all right; a doctor could be had for the baby and it would not be necessary for an ambulance to stop at the door.

The rest of the day, until nearly time for her to keep her "engagement" with her "manager," Mollie sat as if stunned, gazing into the feverish face of her child. Mrs. Henderson, as if entering a chamber of death, came into the room slowly, then, like a warden notifying the condemned that it is time to begin the march to the chair, she whispered, "Dear, it's nearly eight o'clock," then left, knowing she would be in the way.

Mollie rose wearily, went to the mirror and mechanically arranged her hair. Then with a heart-breaking sob she ran to the bed and, getting down on her knees, buried her face in the bedclothes.

Mrs. Henderson, in leaving the room, had left the door

## EAST OF THIRD AVENUE

ajar, and the gas from the jet shot a ray of light into the dark and dirty hall.

In the corner of the hall was a pile of filthy, evil-smelling rubbish which had accumulated from the sweepings of weeks. A rat stuck its head from this heap of filth and, smelling around nervously, ventured farther from its retreat. Then, hearing a footstep on the stairs, it darted back into the darkness.

The footsteps approached and a man, unshaven and minus a hat, stumbled past Mollie's door. "Damn shame—hic—" he muttered, drunkenly, "ain't no elevators in—hic—this swell apartment."

He climbed the next flight and disappeared through a door, to let a waiting wife know there was no salary to live on that week. The corner saloon and the "boys" had taken it all. He had again paid the price of being a "good fellow."

Mrs. Muldoon, with a bundle of torn, but clean, clothes in her arms, left the roof and groped her way down the stairs. She had not been "hitting the stuff" as hard as usual, and in her more or less sober moments had tried her hand at washing the "old man's and the kid's belongin's."

Arriving at Mollie's landing, the ray of gaslight attracted her attention. She peered cautiously through the crack of the open door and saw Mollie on her knees beside the bed. It was the first time in many years that she, of the East Side, had seen a woman on her knees in an attitude of prayer. With a sneer on her face, she decided to eavesdrop.

"O God, is there no other way?" prayed Mollie, in a sobbing voice, raising her head and stretching her arms to heaven.

Then, as if God had answered in the negative, her head drooped with a despairing motion to the bed.

Mrs. Muldoon entered cautiously, with her wash still

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

in her arms, and went to Mollie and stooped over, so that her breath, reeking with the fumes of alcohol, blew into her face. "Dearie, don't you know *there ain't no God east of Third Avenoo?*" she whispered, then quickly withdrew and continued on her way downstairs.

Mollie, dazed, raised her head and looked around. Who had spoken? Where had the voice come from? Had she heard aright, or was it a message from the unknown? Impossible! She could still smell that terrible whisky breath. Rushing to the door, she looked into the hall, but there was nobody there, except a rat which darted back to its hiding place in the heap of filth.

Mollie came to her senses, arranged her toilet quickly, and, putting on her hat, went to the bed and, stooping, kissed the lips of her sleeping child. "It is all for you, darling," she whispered. "If God doesn't forgive me, I know you will understand—that some day you will forgive your mother for what she is about to do."

Then she left to keep her appointment, closing the door noiselessly behind her.

As she went down the stairs the door across the hall opened slowly and Mrs. Henderson, with a "Poor kid!" crossed to the bedroom and took up her watch over the sleeping one.

When Mollie reached the sidewalk she stopped abruptly. A warning voice was whispering in her ear: "Go back before it is too late! Go back!" She shook her head, trying to rid herself of its presence, but to no avail; it persisted, "Go back—go back!"

For a few seconds she stood undecided, then, lowering her head, as if battling with the wind, she pushed forward determinedly. The voice was still. Now, no doubt, it was mustering its forces for revenge against the one who had dared to ignore its kindly warning.

## EAST OF THIRD AVENUE

With Mrs. Muldoon's words ringing in her ears, "*There ain't no God east of Third Avenoo*," she hurried her footsteps westward. She was to meet her "manager" on the *West Side*, at the corner of Fifth Avenue and West Eighteenth Street. Arriving at Third Avenue, she turned to the right and kept on until she reached East Fourteenth Street. Glancing at a clock in a jewelry store, she saw it was twenty minutes to nine. Already she was ten minutes late. She must hurry or else she would be too late. She prayed inwardly that she would, but her feet moved the faster. A force greater than her will was carrying her forward like a chip on the tide.

Out of breath from her exertions, she slowed up a little on Fourteenth Street. As she did so some one touched her on the arm. She turned in fright and looked into the face of one of the many female derelicts who haunt that neighborhood. The hollowed eyes seemed like two charred and blackened windows, but the pupils shone with an unnatural luster, as if the lungs were burning, reflecting the red flare of the flames from the depths. The face was seamed with lines of dissipation and was daubed with rouge. The upper lip was firm and hard, but the nervously twitching lower lip gave it the lie. Two little rivulets of saliva leaked from the corners of her mouth, but were soon dried up in the powder on the dirty chin. The creature's hair was untidy and was coming down in the back. A gaudy hat of many colors was held in place by a single hat pin, which at any moment threatened to come loose.

Mollie shuddered as she gazed into the awful face, and tried to disengage her arm.

"Not so fast, dearie, not so fast," said the street walker, in a cracked voice. "Now ain't y'u goin' to help out yer sister what's in hard luck? Me guts are burnin'



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

up fer a drink. Come on, dearie, the price of a bottle of scat."

Mollie, with another shudder, managed to loosen her arm. At this the woman, with a foul curse, grabbed her by the skirt. Mollie was ready to shriek from terror and disgust. The derelict held on tightly and vented her spleen.

"Tryin' to shake me, are y'u?" she threatened. "Too high an' mighty fer me, are y'u? Well, I used to hunt on the West Side, an' ride in taxis, an' drink wine, an' have swell johns a-payin' me board. But look at me now, swingin' the bag on the East Side, an' bummin' fer drinks, an' knockin' a dollar out o' them what 'll have me. An' you'll come to it as sure as there's a hell, an yer guts 'll burn up same as mine—an' damn you!"

With this outburst she snatched the purse greedily from Mollie's nerveless hand and darted into a near-by doorway.

Mollie was too stunned to follow or to even cry out.

Was this creature a warning from God, picturing to her what she was coming to? Or had that voice relented and placed one more semaphore in her path of destruction? But chips on the tide cannot argue with the waters, and she was swept on her way.

The derelict, watching from the hallway, saw that Mollie had no intention of following her, so she darted into the street and made for Third Avenue, the purse carefully hidden in her stocking.

"Neat work, Mamie, neat work," rasped a harsh voice as she turned the corner, "but kind o' rough to pull in the light. Wanta go up to the Island again?"

Mamie, without answering, tried to make a quick getaway, but she was too slow. The man grasped her wrist in a steel vise, then twisted her arm until she cursed from pain.

## EAST OF THIRD AVENUE

"Oh-ho! tryin' to give me the fade-away, are you?" he sneered. "Well, come across. Let's see what you got."

With a sullen air, Mamie followed him into the back room of a saloon, then reached into her stocking and brought out Mollie's purse. He grabbed it out of her hand and emptied its contents on the table; a dollar bill, two quarters, a penny, a baby's picture, and a card. The man appropriated the bill and silver, ignored the baby's picture, but, picking up the card, read, in a woman's handwriting, "Mollie Eastman, — East 12th Street, care of Mrs. Henderson."

"What in hell do y'u mean riskin' a pinch fer a bunch o' junk like this?" he demanded, scowling at her. "Now get out an' hustle, an' have some jack fer me in the mornin', or I'll clear y'u out o' this neighborhood so fast it 'll make yer head swim."

Mamie protested, but the brute drew his hand back and hit her in the face. She did not flinch from the blow, but the rivulets of saliva took on a reddish hue as blood mixed with water. At sound of the blow, a bartender came into the back room.

"Give her a jolt of red eye, Mack," chuckled the bully to him, "an' chalk it on the ice."

"Mack," with a knowing wink, went to do as he was bid.

The bully entered the barroom and, resting his foot on the rail, ordered "a little private stock," then engaged the bartender in conversation as if nothing unusual had happened. To him, a parasite feeding on the women of the streets, it was not unusual. It was plain business. You had to beat them, or else they would quit work and switch to one who understood them better.

Torn by conflicting emotions, Mollie arrived at Fifth Avenue, crossed over, and stood for a moment on the corner, trying to get her location. She glanced up. A

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

signpost met her eyes. In glaring letters she read, "*West 14th Street!*" At first the significance of it failed to penetrate her tired brain. "*West 14th Street!*" At last she was in the land of God. She was *west* of Third Avenue! Staring at the lamp-post, it took the shape and form of the terrible creature she had just left. A man passing by gave her a curious look and then continued on his way. Mollie, with heart bursting, still looking at the sign, prayed to God as she had never prayed before.

"O God, deliver me *as you see best* from what I am about to do."

The lights on *East Fourteenth Street* twinkled in reply.

But, still battling against that irresistible force, she was swept on to her meeting place.

## VII

### WEST OF THIRD AVENUE

**L**EANING against a lamp-post on the corner of Sixth Avenue and Thirty-fourth Street were Tom Mills and Ed, his actor friend. Attached to the post was a fire-alarm box. Mills was smoking a cigar and talking to his companion.

"Yes, I saw her once after we split up; it was in Pete Short's office. There's a boy fer you. As wise as they make 'em. Now, let me tell you, Ed, she'll be back. They all falls fer me sooner or later, and when she does come back it's me what's goin' to count the dough."

"Yes, but how about the jane you got?" asked Ed. "She's classy, ain't she, an' only nineteen? You oughter make somethin' out o' her."

"Nothin' doin'. She's just pure simp. Nobody home," replied Mills, "but sometimes I think she's better than Mollie with her prayin' an' whinin'. I ain't stuck on Mollie so much, but there ain't no skirt ever got away from Tom Mills yet."

"How about Adele Murphy?" purred Ed.

"Can't you lay off that stuff?" wailed Mills, getting sore. "You know, Ed, I never did make much of a try fer her."

Ed, chuckling to himself, vouchsafed no reply. He was satisfied that his shot had gone home.

On the corner of West Eighteenth Street and Fifth Avenue, Pete Short was impatiently walking up and down

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

and constantly looking at his watch. "I wonder if that jane's double-crossed me and given me the stand-up?" he muttered, stopping to light a match. "Even if she is late, she's well worth waitin' for. Tom Mills sure can pick 'em. If he ever gets wise that I've given him the go-by, hell's goin' to be a-poppin'."

Just then Mollie came into sight.

"Hello, sweetheart!" greeted Short, without raising his hat. "I knew you wouldn't disappoint me, even if you are a trifle off schedule."

Mollie shuddered with disgust, but allowed him to take her arm. He hailed a passing taxi, which drew up to the curb.

"I'm twenty minutes late. Drive like hell!" he instructed the driver. "Burlington Apartments. Don't let nothin' outside of God stop you, an' give Him an argument."

He helped Mollie into the cab. As the door banged behind him a shiver ran through her. "Listen, kid. There ain't nothin' to be afraid of," he assured her. "I got a swell party framed up at the apartment, an' the guests are waitin'. Then, after that, it's *me an' you*."

The taxi driver followed his fare's instructions, and, being a little under the weather himself, he threw discretion and speed laws to the winds and drove "like hell."

Tom Mills, still leaning against the fire-alarm box, turned to his companion. "Listen, Ed, what d'ye say to droppin' in at Pete Short's apartment? He's generally got a live bunch up there, an' swell janes—say, you can't beat 'em! What d'ye say? Let's make a night of it."

Ed was favorably inclined and promptly agreed to Tom's suggestion. Just as they were about to hail a taxi a boy came running down the avenue, shouting,

## WEST OF THIRD AVENUE

"Fire! Fire!" at the top of his lungs. Tom Mills pushed Ed aside and turned in the alarm. The boy, out of breath, arrived at the alarm box and, being questioned by Mills, informed that the fire was "in Joe's restaurant, up the street."

Mills and Ed signaled a taxi and ordered the driver to take them to the Burlington Apartments. A little thing like a fire in Joe's restaurant did not interest them.

Fire truck No. 17, in answer to the alarm turned in by Mills, picked up speed with every second. It had a reputation to maintain as the speediest truck in the department. No. 22 must never beat it to a fire, even if the distance was unequal, and this time 22 had a little the better of it—a matter of five blocks.

The driver, with sleeves rolled up and arms nearly pulled from their sockets by the straining horses, urged his team to redoubled efforts. The men on the truck, while putting on their rubber coats and helmets, encouraged the driver with their shouts:

"Let her out, Mike! Give 'em their heads, old scout! We'll trim that turtle yet!"

As the truck was crossing Fifth Avenue, the driver, too late, saw a speeding taxi closing in on him. With a curse, by main strength he yanked the horses back on their haunches. The man at the wheel swerved the truck and it skidded into the curb. The driver, at the impact, shot out of his seat and landed head first on the stone sidewalk, and lay still, his skull smashed to a pulp.

There came a rending crash as the taxi was hit by the rear wheels of the skidding truck. The taxi driver was crushed to death. The firemen leaped to the ground, some running to the body of Mike, while others ran to the overturned taxi.

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

In an instant a crowd had collected. Pete Short, who had been thrown to the ground and slightly stunned, opened his eyes in a dazed manner and staggered to his feet. He was unhurt. In the crowd he went unnoticed. Two firemen peered into the smashed door of the taxi and saw a white face staring up at them. They gently lifted out the form of Mollie Eastman and carried her to the sidewalk. She was still breathing.

The clanging of an ambulance bell was heard, and soon a white-robed doctor pushed his way through the curious throng. After a hurried examination of Mollie, he ordered her placed in the ambulance, and then, as a matter of form, examined the two dead drivers.

Pete Short, still unnoticed, wormed his way through the crowd until he reached the outer edge, and sneaked away. He did not want any more publicity. His reputation could not stand it.

Brushing himself carefully, he ran down a side street; then, realizing that his hurry might attract attention, he slowed down. Coming to a waiting taxi, he said, weakly:

"Take me to the Burlington Apartments, but be very careful how you drive. I have a bad heart."

A police sergeant detailed a patrolman to go with the ambulance while he searched the taxi for some means of identification.

It was the first night on the "wagon" for the young doctor in white, and he wanted to make good. The driver of the ambulance, an old timer, whispered in his ear: "Doc, better look her over carefully. You know what it means to the staff if you bring in a stiff."

"Nothing serious," answered the doctor, nervous from excitement. "She's only shaken up a bit. Get her in as fast as you can."

## WEST OF THIRD AVENUE

The driver drove at his usual gait.

A taxi drew up in front of the Burlington Apartments, and Tom Mills and Ed got out. They were going to make a night of it.

An ambulance entered the portals of a hospital and was met by two orderlies, a nurse, and the night physician. A dead form was taken from it, and the news spread among the hospital staff that "Doc" Warren, on his first trip, had brought in a "stiff." There was general rejoicing, because it meant a blowout for the entire staff at the doctor's expense.

Pete Short, pale as a ghost, arrived at his apartment and was met by a drunken, noisy crowd of women and men. Among them were Tom Mills and Ed. He was put on the rack for being late, but told them he had been detained on an unexpected business matter. They swallowed his excuse with wry glances, but figured that it was none of their business.

Short called whisky to his aid, and before long he was as noisy and merry as the rest.

The next morning a sorry-looking crowd emerged from the apartment and scattered on their various ways.

At the hospital a wagon drew away from the dead house, taking an unidentified body to the city morgue.

The God of the West Side had answered Mollie's prayer, but "east of Third Avenoo" a little girl baby cried for her mother and was being consoled by a stern-faced woman.



## VIII

### THE TEST

MRS. HENDERSON, with an ever-increasing doubt gnawing at her heart, pacified little Mollie by saying her mother would be home for lunch; that she had gone to see a very nice man, who was going to get her work in a new vaudeville act, and that this work was going to make everyone happy.

While she was telling her this little Mollie gazed into her eyes with that appealing, trusting look of innocent childhood. Unknown to each, it was a battle between innocence on the one side, and deceit on the other. Innocence won, because Mrs. Henderson's gaze faltered before that of the child. With a shrug of her shoulders she turned away. A battle was raging in her heart. For the first time in her life her armor had been pierced.

Had she been betrayed? Had she, against the counsel of her experience and East Side bringing up, "fallen" for a sweet-faced mother and a pretty child? She argued that she had not given in without a fight—that several times she had been on the point of refusing to take Mollie Eastman into her heart and confidence.

Well, it was not too late. She could turn the child over to the authorities if the mother failed to appear. It was not her duty, nor her business, either, to take care of a deserted waif. Then Mollie's earnest face seemed to peer at her from the air, and her determination to follow the

## THE TEST

counsel of her hard and embittered life weakened and she hoped against hope that the mother would return, to prove her fears were groundless.

Perhaps something had happened to the mother. Pshaw! In real life things do not happen, and especially on the East Side. It was all right in books. Anyway, what could have happened? Absolutely nothing, except that the mother, tired by her fight against poverty, and once more tasting the luxury and easy living of the West Side, had selfishly decided to choose the latter.

Her love for the kid? Well, of course that should count, but with a kid around her neck like a millstone, it was hard to find favor in the eyes of those who paid well for what they got. They did not have to deal in kids. They would not be bothered with them. Anyhow, kids are compromising and require lengthy explanations.

Yes, it was much easier for Mollie Eastman to pose as being single. She could get away with it that way. And who knows? Perhaps even those who pay well do not like the idea of hearing their temporary choice called "mother" by a brat they know nothing of.

It could not be otherwise. Mollie Eastman had chosen, and her choice was luxury and ease, and she, Mrs. Henderson, the easy and gullible fool, would take care of the "nuisance." But she would show her she was no easy mark. It was not up to her. The kid would have to take its chances the same as thousands of other kids had done. Certainly it was hard on the kid, but it wasn't her fault. She hadn't made the world. There was supposed to be a God to take care of deserted little ones. Well, if there was, here was a good chance for Him to prove Himself.

In spite of her reasoning, she glanced constantly at the clock and listened eagerly for a familiar footstep in the hall. Once the front door slammed and a light footfall

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

was heard on the stairs. Her heart almost stopped beating. Could it be Mollie? She was afraid to go to the door. The disappointment would be too bitter if it proved to be some one else. No, she would wait, and then ask for an accounting. She certainly would give her a piece of her mind. What right had she to stay away so long and give everyone nervous prostration? No doubt she would have some plausible excuse—but no such excuse would get by. The footsteps grew louder. It was Mollie, all right. She could not mistake the light step.

Little Mollie was listening as intently as Mrs. Henderson, and as the footsteps were heard on the landing outside the door, with a glad cry of "Muvver!" she stretched out her arms. Mrs. Henderson's heart, as though ashamed of its dilatory tactics, commenced pumping the harder and the blood mounted to her face.

She turned in the direction of the door and watched it, fascinated. There was a light tap. Mollie would not knock. The blood receded from her face. But perhaps she was wrong and her ears had deceived her.

The knob turned slowly. Would the door never open? What was the matter? Why did Mollie torture her this way? Little Mollie, with her arms outstretched, waited. It was a lifetime.

The door opened, and a wan, peaked little face showed in the opening. Little Mollie began to cry. Mrs. Henderson turned pale with the sickening pain of acute disappointment as she realized the face in the doorway was little Mary Ryan, the daughter of a next-door neighbor.

Not sensing the situation, the little girl at the door entered.

"Mother sent me up, Mrs. Henderson," she said, in a breathless, apologetic voice, "to ask if you'd be so kind as to loan her a little coffee, an'"— then in a hesitating

## THE TEST

manner, as if she were asking more than could possibly be fulfilled—"an' if you could spare a couple o' slices o' bacon she would be much obliged."

Realizing that a bribe must be offered before Mrs. Henderson had the chance to refuse her request, she continued in an eager voice: "Papa gets paid to-morrow. You know he got in four days' work last week, an' mamma says as soon 's she gets his pay she'll return it an' the thirty cents she borrowed the other day."

Mrs. Henderson, without replying, went across the hall into the kitchen, closely followed by the waif. With a piece of newspaper she made a small cornucopia, and from the shelf took down a tin labeled "Coffee," and filled it with the brown, flowing particles. She went to the mantel and got some change from a worn leather purse and handed it, with the coffee, to the girl.

"Here's the coffee," she wavered in a strained, unnatural voice. "I'm all out o' bacon, but I'll let you have fifteen cents, an' tell your mother it makes forty-five she owes me, an' I've got to have it to-morrow, without fail."

"Yes, ma'am, thanks. Mamma 'll send the money as soon as she gets it from papa."

Mary, with her precious burden, closed the door behind her, and her eager footsteps grew fainter and fainter—a final slam of the front door, and pretty soon the Ryans were assured they would not go hungry that day at least.

Mrs. Henderson returned to the room across the hall. At first, due to her keen disappointment, the crying of little Mollie annoyed her greatly, but as the sobs died down her woman's heart was touched. But the battle was still raging within and she could not muster courage to comfort the little one.

The minute hand of the clock on the dresser was un-

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

affected, and slowly, but on time, made its scheduled revolutions around the circular face.

Mrs. Henderson bundled Mollie in a blanket and carried her to the kitchen. Motherless little girls must be fed, and on schedule, so when both hands pointed to twelve she gave Mollie her bread and milk and assured her again that her mother would soon be home. Mrs. Henderson ate nothing.

Supper time arrived eventually, and again the little one was fed, but Mrs. Henderson could not eat.

Still hoping, she ignored the bedtime for little Mollie, but after an hour had passed she gave up all hope of ever seeing the mother again, so, gathering the tired girl in her arms, she crossed the hall to the bedroom.

As the light from the open door melted the shadows on the landing, a rat, with a squeak of protest, darted back to its abode in the pile of filth in the corner. Even rats on the East Side have their hopes and disappointments.

Undressing Mollie, Mrs. Henderson put her between the covers. The baby, with a puzzled air, looked at her as if something important had been overlooked, but Mrs. Henderson did not understand.

"I 'ain't said my prayers to Dod," reproached a timid little voice.

Mrs. Henderson lifted up the little one, who, kneeling on the bed and leaning against her, prayed her child's prayer, "Now I lay me down to sleep"—and finished with, "Dear papa, please ask Dod to send muvver to me, an' you come, too, papa," and then, as an afterthought, "And tell Dod he can come, too."

The tears were rolling down Mrs. Henderson's cheeks. When Mollie had finished, she bundled her in her arms and, pressing her tightly to her breast, kissed her several times; then, in a voice husky with emotion, whispered in

## THE TEST

the little ear, "*And next time you pray, tell God that Mrs. Henderson's goin' to be your mother from now on.*"

A cold, white face in the city's morgue lighted with a happy smile.

Placing little Molly gently in bed, Mrs. Henderson turned out the gas.

The child turned on her side and, putting her arm around the pillow, soon dreamed it was her mother she was embracing.

Though the room was dark, a beautiful radiance hovered over the sleeping one.

Who dares to say there is no God east of Third Avenue!

## IX

### TWELVE YEARS LATER

**T**HERE was great rejoicing among the pupils of Public School No. — on Second Avenue because it was the last day of school and the summer months of vacation unfolded in front of them as a period of bliss. It is true the joy of some had been dampened temporarily by the knowledge that they had failed in their examinations and had been "left back." But the vista of vacation soon removed all regrets.

Two streams of juvenile humanity were pouring from the entrances marked "Boys" and "Girls." No doubt among the streams were those who felt a sincere regret because they were leaving. These were the ones who had graduated and were eligible to enter high school. Many times in the past they had hated the school and, child-like, had wished the building would burn down. But, now that it was all over and they were leaving for good, they looked back on their tragedies as mere trifles and incidents to be laughed at. Some, though, felt a different regret at the closing of school. These were the more studious—the ones who had passed high in their examinations and had led their classes. What was the use of studying hard all term when, just as the reward was earned, school closed for two months and the opportunity to air their superiority was lost? It seemed a trifle unfair.

There was still another class who felt regret. These

## TWELVE YEARS LATER

were the few who towered above the rest. In addition to leading their classes, they had "skipped." While the other successful ones had finished simply one, two, three, and had been promoted, these monuments of learning had actually skipped the next grade and had been entered on the rolls of the succeeding higher grade. There were no "ifs" about it; they were mentally superior to their classmates. Their attitude reminded one of a United States Senator when in the presence of an ordinary Congressman. The chasm was too great to be spanned.

Congregated around the entrance marked "Girls" were Mary Ryan, Esther Goldstein, Rosa Freschi, and several younger girls of the lower grades. They were waiting for some one. During their conversation they looked constantly in the direction of the school yard. Each of the three older girls carried a neatly rolled graduation diploma tied daintily with white ribbon.

Mary Ryan had carelessly stuck her diploma under the strap around her books and had apparently forgotten it. She held the piece of white paper more or less in contempt, even though it certified she was eligible to enter high school. She did not consider it an award of merit, because, in her own words, she "had graduated by the skin of her teeth, and the teachers only passed her to get rid of her—and, anyway, what good was a piece of paper and silk ribbon when it came to getting a job in a department store?"

Rosa Freschi was very careful of her diploma. In fact, she fondled it. It was something to be worshiped. As soon as she got home it would be passed around an admiring family circle, and then framed in a large gold frame, and would take its place in the parlor between her father's testimonial from the Foresters of America, and the gaudy print of the Crucifixion. To her it was a medal to be



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

pinned on her breast and flaunted proudly to the world. The Latin blood in her craved for outward show, just as the soldiers of Latin countries brave death in order to win crosses and decorations—testimonials to their achievements to be passed down from generation to generation.

Esther Goldstein was also proud of her diploma. She was waiting for the moment when at home she could translate its meaning to an admiring father and mother. No doubt her father would shrug his shoulders in order not to betray his pride in his daughter, and would dismiss the whole affair by remarking, "I got it a smart daughter at school, but brains is needed for the pizness."

But the sting of his remark would be instantly removed by her mother's sly pinch of commendation and pride.

The younger girls could not take their eyes from the three pieces of paper. To them the diplomas shone as the goals of life's greatest success; they were something to be striven for through future ups and downs of school terms. The girls were not in the least envious; to them it would have been *lèse majesté*. They simply worshiped at a respectful distance.

"I tell you that kid's going to make a hit," said Mary Ryan, in a confidential tone to Rosa. "*She's smart*. There ain't no bull about her. She's got the goods; barely fifteen, and she ups and beats us all to it. Say, if I had that voice of hers, I wouldn't worry for the rest of *my* life."

"If I had of studied the way she did, I would have passed highest, too," replied Rosa, enviously.

"Nix, Rosa, nix! You ain't in a class with Mollie Eastman, an' never will be. If you had of studied! Huh! Fellows take up too much of your time. Say, the guys on the avenoo are nutty about you. You're a hit in that line, all right, all right."

## TWELVE YEARS LATER

The latter part of Mary's speech seemingly made up for her previous insults, because Rosa, mollified, took from her school bag a small mirror, gazed into it admiringly, then gave a deft touch to a lock of hair. "I'll admit she's smart," returned she, in an even tone, pleased at her reflection in the glass, "but what's the use of bein' smart in school if you can't go through with it? There ain't no chance of her goin' to high school. She's got to get out and hustle like the rest of us, and, believe me, I'm goin' to hustle while the hustlin's good. There ain't no money—or a good time, either—to be got out o' books."

Esther Goldstein had been an interested listener, but on Rosa's reference to money she evidently thought it was her turn to say something.

"Rosa's right," she volunteered. "It's the money that counts. You can't get anywhere in this world without it. It's me for a good job, and I don't have to look for one, neither. Father fixed that up a year ago. And when a feller comes along with dough, he won't have to ask me *twice* to marry him."

"What! Marry for money?" exclaimed Rosa. "I should say not! I've got to love a fellow first. I wouldn't care if he didn't have a nickel, just so long as I loved him."

"If he had money you could learn to love him, Rosa," retorted Esther, as if her reply had settled the matter for good.

A scornful look was her only answer. What did Esther Goldstein know of love? She had never been out with Tom Malone, or listened to the talk of Tony Shapiro. Perhaps a walk through the Park with blond-haired Arthur Peterson on a Sunday afternoon would materially change her mind. Experience counted. When you could number your sweethearts on the fingers of both hands, then perhaps there would be some leeway for her remark.

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Mary Ryan, the most sophisticated of the three, let the others ramble on, but listened with a tolerant look. Perhaps some day they would learn sense.

One could easily imagine that Mary was an exact duplicate of Mrs. Henderson as a girl. In her eyes she had that far-away, comprehending look, as if there had been a minute rift in the veil of the future and a glimpse had been caught of the hopelessness of it all.

A door in the school yard banged, and Mollie Eastman, surrounded by several girls, all talking and laughing at once, came merrily down the yard with the light, care-free steps of happy schoolgirls. Mary was the first of the group of girls at the entrance to spy Mollie. With an impatient wave of her hand she signified that she was waiting.

Mollie, catching the signal, hurriedly joined the girls at the gate.

"For goodness' sake," reproached Mary, assuming an injured air, "where have you been? We've been waiting fifteen minutes for you."

"I'm awfully sorry to have kept you waiting, Mary, but I had to say good-by to my teacher. See the lovely present she gave me."

Amid a chorus of eager entreaties, she carefully unwrapped an oblong package tied with dainty ribbon and held up a book of Tennyson's poems to a somewhat disappointed bevy of girls. Even the younger ones, in their curiosity, had bridged the chasm of awe for the graduates, and were pushing on the outer edge of the circle to get a glimpse of a present given to a pupil by a teacher.

"Good night!" exclaimed Mary, being the first to voice her disappointment. "A book of poems! Just like a teacher. The poor nuts—they 'ain't got no brains. What good's poetry to anyone?"

## TWELVE YEARS LATER

Tears showed in Mollie's eyes, but after swallowing hard a couple of times, temper came to her rescue.

"Well, it suits me," she responded, angrily, her eyes flashing. "If you don't like it, don't look at it. Anyway, it's not for you; it's for *me*."

Mollie certainly had not inherited this spirit from her mother. Under similar circumstances her mother would have been wounded sorely by the derision of the girls and would have vouchsafed no reply.

"It might have been something useful, Mollie," suggested Esther Goldstein, in her practical way, "but, anyway, it's a swell book and I bet it cost two dollars if it cost a cent."

A look of gratitude was her reward. "Let's forget it," returned Mollie, with a smile, her outburst of temper dying suddenly. "I didn't mean to be catty, but I just naturally got sore, that's all."

The other girls were quick to admit that they meant nothing by what they had said, and assured her that a book of poems was an ideal gift.

Rosa Freschi had been trying unsuccessfully to attract the attention of Mollie; then, finally succeeding, she drew her to one side. "Listen, Mollie," she whispered, excitedly. "You know Tom Malone? Well, he's invited me to Weber's Vaudeville House to-night, and he's got a chum who hangs out in Kelly's poolroom—a peach of a fellow—and"—lowering her voice—"he's stuck on you. Yes, he is, too! He saw you with me and Esther the other day. Well, his name is Bert Riley, and he wants you to go, too. Got tickets an' everything. What do you say? It'll be great fun."

"I'm sorry," returned Mollie, "but I guess I can't go."

"You can get home easy by eleven," persuaded Rosa.

"I told my mother I was going over to your house, and

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

you can tell Mrs. Henderson you're going over to mine. They'll never find out the difference. And, listen—right after the show we're goin' to a chop-suey joint on Second Avenue. I've been there before—and it's great."

"Nothing doing, Rosa," protested Mollie, with a decided shake of her head. "I don't want to meet him, and—anyway, I can't go."

"Aw, come on, Mollie," begged Rosa. "Watcha going to do, spoil the party? There isn't any harm in going to a show with a fellow, is there?"

"No, I don't think there's any harm in it, but it just doesn't interest me, that's all," answered Mollie; "but I do think there's harm in lying to your mother."

"I wasn't lying to her. What difference does it make whether I go to your house or to a show? What she doesn't know won't hurt her, will it? Say, this other fellow's *there*, and he's got all kinds of money and knows how to blow it. He's the best pool shot on the avenue. It would be different if we hadn't graduated, but we're through with school now."

"I won't go, Rosa," concluded Mollie, with determination; "so that settles it."

"Please, only this once. Don't make a fool out of me. I'll look sweet telling Riley you won't go, after promising him to get you. Aw, please."

"There's no use coaxing, Rosa. I've got to stay with mother, to-night."

"Well, then, stay with her," rejoined Rosa, in a huff. "Bert Riley can get plenty of girls, and older than you, too. Anyway, Mrs. Henderson isn't your mother." Noticing the angry look on Mollie's face, Rosa realized her case was hopeless, and in a fit of temper exclaimed, in a voice loud enough for the rest of the girls to hear: "You've got nothing to be so stuck up about. Everybody

## TWELVE YEARS LATER

on the avenue, and in school, too, knows your mother ran away with a man and left you to starve when you were a kid, and if it hadn't been for Mrs. Henderson you would—"

Smack! A girl's hand landed squarely on her ear. Mary Ryan, at the commencement of Rosa's tirade, had approached from the rear, and, at her last words, had delivered the slap with all her strength.

Hot, angry tears welled in Mollie's eyes. She trembled all over. Her precious book of poetry dropped to the ground, and she stood momentarily undecided. Then, like a tigress, she sprang at Rosa. "You're a liar!" she screamed. "It isn't so—it isn't so! My mother didn't do it—she didn't do it. She's dead. She's good, I tell you—she's good—"

Rosa didn't wait to hear the rest, but ran down the street without looking back. Most of the girls crowded around Mollie, some of them sympathizing with her and trying to pacify her, while others congratulated Mary on her quick action. One or two stood aloof from the rest and engaged in earnest conversation, the while solemnly nodding their heads like gossips and scandal mongers of more mature years.

Mary wiped the tears from Mollie's face, then picked up her book and diploma. "Never mind that wop," she counseled. "She always was a trouble maker, and, believe me, she won't forget that rap in the ear for a week. Wait until I catch her. She's in for the beating of her sweet young life. And if any of you are looking for trouble," she threatened, defiantly, addressing the rest of the girls, "you won't have to go far to get it."

They quickly assured her they were for Mollie *strong*.

"Well, then, beat it," returned Mary, contemptuously, "and beat it while your shoes are good."

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

They "beat" it.

Mary took Mollie by the arm and they walked home slowly. Neither referred to the incident. Mary was a diplomat in human nature. She knew that forgetfulness was the only balm for Mollie's hurt. Mollie appreciated her kindness by giving her arm a loving squeeze. At the pressure Mary's face lighted with a radiance that softened the hard lines and filled in the hollows, which gave one an idea of the underlying beauty that would have blossomed forth if she had been raised in one of society's hot-houses west of Third Avenue.

As the two girls turned into East Twelfth Street, four boys about nine years old spied them and rushed to them in great excitement.

"Johnny Muldoon's pinched," they shouted, in chorus. "He croaked a guy on de head. Dey got 'im in jail. De ambulance took the—"

Mary held up both hands for silence. "Now, one at a time," she ordered, singling out the oldest urchin. "What's the trouble, Charlie? The rest of you shut up. What is it—what's the matter?"

"Shut up, youse," enjoined Charlie of the others, in a superior air. "How's a guy going to talk wid youse all hollerin' at oncet?" He was bursting with importance. "I *seen* it myself," volunteered he. "Dese kids here only *heard* about it." Then in aggravating silence he waited for Mollie and Mary to grasp the significance of his statement.

"Johnny Muldoon has an argument wid de guy what sells papers on de corner," resumed he, unable to restrain himself longer; "you know—Jake, de old guy wid de sour mush. Well, in de argument Johnny hits him on de bean wid one o' dem heavy paper weights what holds de papers down. He must o' cracked his skull—guess he's

## TWELVE YEARS LATER

croaked, all right—ambulance takes him away—an' de cop pinches Johnny—rides him in de wagon. Dese kids don't know nothin' about it—" Then, swelling his chest with pride, he continued, nonchalantly, "An' dey takes me name as one o' de witnesses, an' I guess I'll go to court, all right, 'cause I seen it wid me own eyes."

The two girls were horrified at the news, and, separating, hurried home to get further details. Mollie, taking the steps two at a time, rushed upstairs to the kitchen where Mrs. Henderson was waiting for her.



## X

### "MOTHER"

**T**WELVE years had caused quite a change in Mrs. Henderson. Her hair had turned gray, but more from worry and hardship than from age. The lines in her face had deepened, but had softened with the deepening. There was a new look in her eyes. The hopeless one had been replaced by one which we will call mother love. If anything, she was neater and cleaner than when we saw her last. There was a something in her manner which reminded one of a soldier who had just been commended by his commanding general for some gallant deed in action—perhaps for rescuing his comrades at the risk of his life.

It was not pride, nor conceit, nor arrogance, but just plain satisfaction; satisfaction in the knowledge that she had kept her promise made twelve years before—"and next time you pray, tell God that Mrs. Henderson's goin' to be your mother from now on."

Mollie hurried to her and kissed her lovingly, but now the woman was not bashful in the kiss she returned. Years of tender love for the little girl, years of hardship, years of toil and privation, had evaporated her feeling of backwardness like mists in the sun's rays.

Twelve years had also made many changes in the kitchen and living room. It shone like a new penny, and the sink had a screen around it. The shelves above

## "MOTHER"

the sink were hidden by white-muslin curtains, and a box of pansies adorned the kitchen window. The ninety-five-cent alarm clock had been replaced by a cheap but pretty clock which *struck the hours*, and, to cap the climax, a cage with a *real singing canary* hung in the window over the pansies, but well out of reach of prowling cats which, attracted by the bird's singing, might have braved the dangers of the fire escape. It is dangerous for cats on the East Side to explore fire escapes in broad daylight. Out in the hall the pile of rubbish and filth had disappeared, and also its occupant, the rat.

Mrs. Henderson held Mollie at arm's length for a few seconds, looking into her eyes, then shook her playfully. "Let's take a look at it," she chuckled. "I see it. You can't hide it under your arm, white ribbon and all."

Holding her diploma well out of reach, Mollie drew two chairs up to the table, then, beckoning with her finger, she called Mrs. Henderson to her and made her sit down while she drew her own chair close to that of the elder woman. Trying to appear calm and collected, but with her heart beating like a trip hammer against her ribs, she unfolded the paper and spread it out on the table in front of her.

"There!" exclaimed she, "and I passed highest in my class, too."

She leaned back in her chair to get a better view of the effect of her words. Gladness and pride lighted the face of Mrs. Henderson, but this was followed quickly by a look of sadness, as a swift-moving cloud passing in front of the sun casts a fleeting shadow over a sunny landscape. Swift as the change was, it did not escape the sharp eyes of Mollie.

"What is it, mother?" she queried, in an endearing voice. "What were you thinking of? Was it of *her*?"

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Mrs. Henderson nodded and her eyes filled with tears. Then, as if attempting to brush memory aside, she smiled and inspected the diploma closely. "Mollie, this is the happiest day of my life," she vouchsafed. "I knew right along that you had them all skinned to death when it comes to learnin' and books, an' now you've gone and showed 'em all up. But wait an' see what I've got for you."

She rose, went into the bedroom, and reappeared with a large, square package wrapped in heavy brown paper. She ordered Mollie to close her eyes. The girl turned her back and nearly died with curiosity while listening to sundry cracklings of paper. Mrs. Henderson, on purpose, untied the package slowly, while Mollie besought her to hurry. At last the operation was finished and a large gold frame was laid on the table.

At a word from her, Mollie turned, and at sight of the frame went into an ecstasy of delight.

"There was one in the store a little fancier," said Mrs. Henderson, smiling broadly at Mollie's appreciation of her gift, "but it cost four dollars more. Nobody could tell the difference unless they got up close. As it was, I went into five places before I could get this one. In the other stores they all looked cheap. I got this for three ninety-eight. It used to be five dollars, but it had a little chip off the corner and they marked it down, so I figured that with a ten-cent bottle of gilt paint I could save a dollar. The regular ones at three ninety-eight can't touch this one. Notice how natural them birds in the corners look."

Mollie was quick to assure her the frame could not be improved upon if it had cost three times the amount.

For the next ten minutes they busied themselves attaching picture wire and placing the diploma in the frame. Another ten minutes were consumed hanging it over the

## "MOTHER"

mantelpiece. Mrs. Henderson went to the far end of the room to see if the frame was hung straight, while Mollie stood on a chair to make corrections.

After several admonitions—"A little to your right. No, that's too much. Back a little. There, that's about right"—Mrs. Henderson changed places on the chair while Mollie passed judgment. Finally the frame was hung to suit them both, and they stood at a distance to admire it. It was hard to tell which was the prouder of the two.

After the book of poems had been admired and Mollie had read several verses from it, the excitement died down.

For the moment Mollie had forgotten about Johnny Muldoon's misfortune, but, remembering suddenly, a sympathetic look appeared in her eyes. "Mother," she inquired, "did you hear about Johnny?"

"Yes, Mollie. It's too bad. I guess Johnny's got himself in wrong. Since he moved from here years back he took up with a bad gang. It's a clear case of manslaughter, all right, but I don't blame Johnny. The snow got him, and that kike on the corner refused to let him have some on tick. It's a shame the way they sell that stuff in the open. Every since Johnny's mother died the boy has went to the dogs. How he ever got to takin' the stuff's beyond me. When he was a kid he used to get it for Mr. Henderson, but he was too young then to know. It's a sad case, all right, but they happen every day on the East Side, and we've got trouble enough of our own without borrowin' none."

Youth on the East Side is the same as youth on the West Side. Trouble is only fleeting, and Mollie, though very depressed over Johnny's trouble, soon forgot and busied herself with household duties.

To Mrs. Henderson, Johnny's case was simply one of

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

many. The fact that he had lived in the same house with her and had been personally associated in her life did not make much more difference, because, in her eyes, it was the survival of the fittest, and Johnny had paid the price of the weakling. She soon forgot also, and Johnny Muldoon passed out of her life forever.

## XI

### BEHIND THE GREEN LIGHTS

**B**UT there were persons on the East Side who, though not loving him, were vitally interested in Johnny's welfare, interested in so far as it affected their safety.

Capt. John Mulvaney, of the —th Precinct, was "up against it" by Johnny's arrest. On the West Side he would have been described as being in a very embarrassing position.

Mulvaney, the cop, who years before had remarked, "Yer getting too raw, Jake, when it comes to passin' it out to kids," had risen from the ranks, not because he had been an exemplary patrolman, but because he had known how to obey orders from "higher up" and possessed the happy faculty of never inquiring the "why" thereof.

If at times his orders had required him to overlook certain things on his beat, he was as blind as a bat, but if they called for sharpness of eye the eagle was relegated to second place.

His memory, also, could be very defective at times, especially when, owing to unforeseen and unfortunate circumstances, the law required his presence on the witness stand; but if a "tip" came from "headquarters," he could remember things that never happened.

Mulvaney, as a patrolman, was a very valuable asset to the "gang," but became more valuable when promoted to roundsman. Reaching this position, he began to think, but thought in the right way, so he soon became sergeant.

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Even so, prosperity did not spoil him. He did not get a "big head" and kick at his share of the "graft"; he was satisfied to wait. With each promotion his share got larger. He was not going to kill the proverbial goose. When he was "promoted" to lieutenant, in addition to receiving a comfortable rake-off, several times he entered into the counsels of the "magic circle." Some of the "big ones" began to call him John, but still his head retained its normal size.

He was wise enough to realize that familiarity breeds contempt, so he carefully refrained from answering in the same vein. His actions soon bore fruit, because a captaincy was created for him. Now they all called him John, and in one or two instances he had taken the plunge and had called first names in return. At last he was on solid ground—his familiarity had not been resented. Perhaps without risk he could kick for a larger share of the spoils.

He tried it and was not turned down. An inspectorship, right now, was dangling before his eyes. Then it all had to be spoiled because a fool of a cocaine fiend had been silly enough to lose his temper and had croaked a man in broad daylight, and in the presence of witnesses, too. The daylight was not so bad, but the witnesses—that was a different aspect. Why couldn't he have waited until alone with his victim, and then croaked him? Things could have been smoothed over, or perhaps some one else the gang was after could have been easily "framed" for the "job."

But no, he had to "spill the beans," and there was hell to pay. He knew the type—Muldoon would never take his medicine like a man. When the "chair" or life imprisonment loomed before him, what would he do? The answer was easy—just naturally squeal and drag them all

## BEHIND THE GREEN LIGHTS

down with him. Crooks never did have any honor or guts—they were always looking out for themselves.

If, by turning state's evidence, Muldoon could save his skin, he would soon forget past favors. There was no gratitude in him. Well, he was up against it, and up against it proper, and the gang were also "in Dutch" with him. Perhaps they could devise a way out, but things looked black for all concerned.

Should he have a talk with Muldoon before notifying the rest, and see what could be done? Upon second thought he determined it would be wiser to notify them first, because then the "buck" could not be passed to him for "jamming" things.

Mulvaney made up his mind to the course he would follow, and lost no time in acting. This was one reason for his rapid promotion into the favor of the ones who counted—he thought quickly and acted quicker.

Going to the door of his office, he beckoned to his lieutenant at the desk, who quickly came at his chief's call. The lieutenant knew trouble was brewing; he also could make four out of two and two—that was one of the reasons why he was lieutenant in this particular precinct.

The captain believed in having a staff around him that could be trusted in ticklish affairs, and he made sure that to a certain extent their own skins would be in danger if the "beans were spilled." Therefore the lieutenant was also nervous, and he plainly showed it.

"What's the matter with you? Brace up. You got a face like a corpse. First thing you know, everybody'll get wise that somethin's up. Cut it out! And shoot over to Davis an' tell him to meet me in Starkey's, upstairs, in half an hour. But, for the love of Moses, wipe that look off your face! Lost your nerve?"



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

"I 'ain't lost my nerve," returned the lieutenant, "but things do look bad, Cap, an' I can't afford to get in a mix-up now, especially after just gettin' clear of the Brady case."

"You get over and see Davis," commanded Mulvaney. "We gotta work quick or we'll all be in the jug or get broke. This ain't no time for cryin'."

The lieutenant lost no time. He had been gone about ten minutes when the sergeant at the switchboard said, in a low voice to the captain, who was now sitting at the desk, "Mr. Davis on the wire, Captain, and—"

"Put him on," interrupted the captain, as he reached eagerly for the telephone.

"Hello! That you, Mr. Davis? . . . I'll meet you at Starkey's right away. There's hell to pay."

Hanging up the receiver, he put on his hat. "Take care of things," he growled at the sergeant. "Guess I'll be back in about an hour. Now remember, if any of them fresh reporters comes an' gets nosey, you knows nothing, an' don't let them see Muldoon. Understand, *you knows nothing.*"

"Just leave them ducks to me, Cap," winked the sergeant. "I'll handle 'em all right."

The captain hurried from the station house without reply. "I guess things *are* in a hell of a mess," gloomed the sergeant. "Have seen it comin' for some time. It don't pay to take no chances in this game. Thank God I've been straight." And then, as if an afterthought, "I hope Joe, the barber, ain't mixed up in this, 'cause it'll go hard with me if he squeals."

An air of nervousness pervaded the station house as guilty consciences commenced to work.

Entering a side door of Starkey's saloon, the captain was met by a waiting bartender. "He's in the back room

## BEHIND THE GREEN LIGHTS

on the third floor," he whispered, jerking his thumb at a flight of stairs.

The captain took the steps two at a time and burst into a room occupied by a man about thirty-five years of age. It was Davis, a well-built man, blond, five feet ten in height, and handsome. His only apparent weakness was a decidedly sensuous mouth. He was sitting on the edge of the bed, calmly smoking a cigar, when the captain entered. As the door opened he turned with an inquiring glance at Mulvaney, chewed on his cigar a couple of seconds, then looked at his watch.

"What's all the hullabaloo about?" he inquired, in an unruffled tone. "Must be pretty important, judging by the look on your face."

"Johnny Muldoon, the dope," whispered the captain, in a shaky voice, "has up an' croaked Jake, one of the guys what sells our stuff. An' the damn fool does it right on the avenoo an' stands for a pinch."

"What was the matter with the cop?" growled Davis, turning the cigar in his mouth. "Wasn't he fixed? Why didn't he let him make a get-away?"

"Let him make a get-away?" sneered the captain. "The cop was all right an' give him all the chanct in the world to beat it, but, no, the dope had got him, an' he stands there like paralyzed an' just looks at the guy what he croaks, an' then kicks him. Even at that the cop gives him the sign to leg it. I know Schwartz—he's a wise one—but Muldoon just stands there an' a crowd gathers an' Schwartz has *got* to make the pinch."

"Well, what of it? Can't it be hushed up? We ought to be able to fix it so he gets off with a few years, and the pardon board can do the rest. It was in self-defense, wasn't it?" This with a knowing wink at the captain.

"Self-defense, hell! That was all right for Brady. We

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

got away with it once, but this comes too soon after. You remember the stink the papers made about it? Well, those guys are just layin' for us, an' this time they've got the goods on us."

"Then I guess the only thing to do is to let Muldoon take his medicine. We've got to look after our own skins. Can't afford to take any chances by saving him."

Delivering his ultimatum, Davis rose as if the interview was ended.

The captain stared at him in stupefaction. Had Davis gone crazy? "Let him take his medicine!" he wailed. "Supposin' he ups and squeals? What happens to us, I'd like to know? What happens to us?"

"That's right, too," admitted Davis, resuming his sitting position on the bed. "It would be serious if he turned loose, wouldn't it? This is a matter that needs thought, and damned serious thought at that."

He removed the cigar from his mouth, looked at it in a vacant way, then threw it from him. Gazing furtively around the room, he beckoned for the captain to come closer.

"How far gone is he with the snow?" he whispered.

A frightened look overspread the captain's face, as if he knew what was coming. "Can't get along without it," he intoned, it being his turn to glance furtively around. "It's got him, all right."

"Well, then," hissed Davis, "why not see that he gets enough to fix him? A strong overdose ought to do the trick."

"Who in hell's going to do it? *I'm not*," answered the captain, defiantly, with an apprehensive look at the door. The conversation was getting on his nerves.

"I guess you'll do it if you're told to," snarled Davis, a sinister glint in his eye. "I don't mean for you to

## BEHIND THE GREEN LIGHTS

croak him yourself, but you can fix it so it can be pulled off."

"We could never get away with it, I tell you," whined the captain, all the spunk taken out of him by the implied threat in Davis's voice. "The papers are goin' after this case hot. If he croaks, they're goin' to ask how the dope reached him, an' the buck's passed to me. We gotta find some other way. We're in bad, I tell you."

Davis thought awhile, then nodded his head slowly, as if agreeing with the captain.

"You're right," he admitted, rising from the bed. "We sure are in bad, but there must be a way out. It won't be the first tight hole we've squeezed out of. I'll get in touch with the rest right away, and we'll try to dope it out, but in the meantime keep your eyes and ears open, and your mouth shut. Remember, *your mouth shut*, and don't do anything unless you get instructions from the right source. You'd better beat it now and take charge yourself. So long, until you hear from me. Don't let anyone see you go out."

"All right, I'll wait orders," replied the captain as he left.

Davis went to the window, but stood well back so as not to be observed, and waited, to give the captain time to get well away. At the expiration of five minutes he left the room and went out by the back door.

## XII

### "ROULETTE JACK"

AMONG the criminal element, Jack Davis was familiarly known as "the Dope King." Although not a user of drugs himself—he was too wise for that—still he made "big money" through the distribution of them.

It was whispered in the meeting places of crooks that he was only the figurehead of the "Dope Ring"; that the real head was a millionaire, who had made his fortune in a large company that secretly manufactured and distributed drugs among the denizens of the lower East Side.

Whether Davis was the real head of the system or not did not make much difference to them. He was the power to get them out of scrapes. He pulled with the police. His pull was not with the ordinary patrolmen, nor with the sergeants, nor with the captains. It came from a higher source, straight from "headquarters." In fact, Davis was the "boss," and they accepted him as such and were willing to obey him so long as he had the power to make them obey. He was not generally liked by those who had the privilege of associating with him. He was not a man who made friends, but still he was respected and feared.

On Broadway, where his connection with the criminal element was not known generally, he was nicknamed "Roulette Jack," because of his passion for that game. The ambition of his life was to become the proprietor of a

## "ROULETTE JACK"

"swell" gambling establishment. Not the kind which catered to "pikers," who could only afford to risk a few dollars nightly, but he wanted a place capable of entertaining the "bloods" of New York. A place where thousands would change hands on the turn of a card or the revolution of a wheel. And Davis was not a quitter. In his heart he knew that sooner or later his ambition would be realized, but the waiting was hard. It took money and "pull" to be a big gambler in New York, so he was striving hard for both.

To date he had acquired, through hard work and the constant use of his brain in outthinking the other fellow, a certain amount of "pull" and a few thousand dollars. But the "pull" was maintained by splitting the returns from his crooked enterprises with those in office, on a "fifty-fifty" basis. In his eyes it was not fair, but he decided wisely that for the present, at least, he would have to put up with it.

His brain was working constantly to devise schemes by which he could get something "on" the "big fellows." By this method he would be able to reverse the situation and make them "come across" with their influence and, at the same time, pay him a percentage of *their* gains. But it was ticklish work and had to be handled carefully and with skill. It required brains and patience. Davis had both. If he had used his talents in Wall Street instead of on Broadway and the East Side, his ambition would have been realized much quicker and some of our big financiers would have had a dangerous competitor. But every man to his hunting ground.

Upon leaving Starkey's, his brain was in a quandary. For the first time in his life his confidence had left him—he was really worried.

Why should he be so upset just because one of his "dope

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

runners" had been arrested for killing a man? Was he losing his nerve? And just at the time when things were beginning to break right. A few months more, with a little "Davis luck," and his establishment would be set up and going full speed. Only two more men to "fix," and the city would be "wide open" for him. Of course, about 40 per cent of the receipts of a place like the one he had in mind would have to be paid in "graft," but in time he would be rich.

At first things would have to be run on the "square," but gradually "brace" games could be installed, and "suckers" were plentiful. If he did not go too "raw," he could run on indefinitely. That was the trouble with most of them in the game, he reasoned; they got hoggish and used such raw methods that they simply could not last, but with him it was going to be different. He didn't want it all; a fair percentage would do.

His mind ran on in this strain until, bumping into a passer-by, he was brought forcefully back to the present. Where was he? There was trouble to be overcome before his dreams could be realized. Oh yes, Johnny Muldoon had made a fool of himself by killing a man. Why was it that such fools as Muldoon should crop up to spoil his plans? There was no justice in the world. Well, there was no use crying over spilled milk; action was needed, and he had to supply it.

Arriving at a corner, he paused on the curb and looked at his watch. It was nearly half past five. By six o'clock the judge would be home. Should he see him before or after supper? Perhaps after supper would be better, because, no doubt, his "Honor" would be in a more amicable mood after eating. From experience he had found they generally were. After supper it was. Reaching this determination, he hailed a taxi and ordered the driver to take

## **"ROULETTE JACK"**

him slowly around the Park and then back to No. — East Seventy-first Street, a couple of doors from Fifth Avenue.

Riding a few blocks in the taxi, he spied a drug store and knocked on the window pane for the driver to stop. Telling him to wait, he went into a booth and called the —th Precinct on the wire. It was wiser to be thoroughly posted before seeing the judge. One could never tell what would happen in a short time, especially in the game he was playing. After the usual vexatious delay, he got his number.

"Hello! That you, Mulvaney?" he queried. "This is Davis. Anything new?"

"What do you mean—anything new?" came back over the wire.

"Cut out that stuff!" he snapped, in an angry voice. "This is Davis. You know what I mean. I'm in a hurry."

"I don't know any Davis," persisted the voice at the other end. "What's the game?"

"Roulette," answered Davis. "What's the matter with you? I've got no time for kidding."

"All right, Mr. Davis," returned Mulvaney's voice. "I've got you now. I was pretty sure it was you, but I was takin' no chances over the phone, with a lot of them fresh newspaper guys trying to put something over. I'm in jam enough."

"That's the stuff, Cap," commended Davis, pleased at the captain's caution. "Play them safe." He drew the door of the booth tightly shut. "Anything new about 'the dope'?" he inquired, almost whispering.

"No, things is about the same. Only, we got him coked to the ears so he's pickin' grapes from the cell bars. I've stalled off the reporters till the mornin'. Waitin' orders from you. Got anything new?"

"Nope. I'm on my way now to see the judge. Keep



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Muldoon snowed up until I tell you to let down on him. Will call you later. If anything happens, ring me up at the same number, after eight. So long." And he hung up the receiver and re-entered the taxi.

During his drive around Central Park, Davis thought out his plan of action and was surprised when the taxi arrived at its destination in East Seventy-first Street. He alighted, paid his fare, and mounted the steps of a brownstone mansion. His ring was answered by a trimly dressed maid, and Davis could not resist the temptation of ogling her. His one great weakness was women. He generally found favor in their eyes, and the maid was no exception to this rule, which was apparent by her smile.

Davis's "Tell the Judge I want to see him" plainly showed it was not the first time he had called.

He waited in the hall while the maid went upstairs with his message. As she mounted the steps she was careful to lift her dress just high enough to display a pair of neat little ankles. Her action was not lost on Davis, and he made a mental note, to be referred to later when affairs of import were not so pressing.

"The Judge says to come right up, Mr. Davis," called a pert voice from the top of the stairs, interrupting his thoughts.

He lost no time in reaching the second landing. As he passed the maid he gave her a slight pinch on the arm. Had he turned around he would have been rewarded by two coal-black eyes fondly staring after him.

He entered the Judge's study. A man of about fifty years rose to greet him and offered him a chair.

## XIII

### THE MAJESTY OF THE LAW

**J**UDGE JULIUS SCHMITT had resigned from the bench about three years previously, and had again taken up his practice of law. After his retirement rumor had it that he had been forced to resign on account of some inside dealings in the notorious Burton murder case. It was said that the acquittal of Burton had netted him well into the hundreds of thousands. But rumor is only rumor, and men cannot be convicted by it. There was never an official investigation, so the matter died in the public eye as new scandals arose to attract attention.

Schmitt was a broad-minded bachelor. Rumor again bobbed up and said he was a familiar figure at the stage entrances of certain musical comedies, but this was personal and none of rumor's business, so he got away with it. Along Broadway, if one "gets away with it," he deserves credit. The only crime in the eyes of the Great White Way is getting caught.

So far, Judge Schmitt had not been caught, therefore he was deserving of credit. He portioned out a goodly share for himself, and this, added to what the rest gave him, allowed him to live on East Seventy-first Street, a respected member of so-called "high society."

Davis accepted the proffered chair and lost no time in explaining full details to the judge, also impressing upon him the need for immediate action.

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

After listening carefully, without comment, the judge poured a "three-finger" drink of rye from a decanter on the table, held it up to the light, and then drank it slowly. Soda and ice water were strangers to the judge's table. He took things straight. He believed in having good whisky and attractive women servants always at hand.

Davis was leaning forward on his elbows, every sense intent on the least move of the judge. This was the man who could get them out of their scrape, if there was a possible way out. He admired Judge Schmitt, admired him and envied him. Here was a man with brains, the master of them all. If he, Davis, could only get something on the judge, something in writing, something that would convict him, he would be happy. If the judge were only in his power and working for him, what a "clean-up" he could make.

The judge removed his glasses, rubbed them with a piece of chamois, and fitted them carefully into their case. Then, in an aggravatingly slow manner he put the case in his upper left-hand vest pocket, leaned over and touched a button.

The maid appeared so suddenly that Davis feared inwardly she had been eavesdropping. The maid *knew* she had. Perhaps in the future certain startling information which she had carefully stored away while in the employ of the judge might enable her to wear sables and ride in automobiles. Even maids are ambitious and have desires, and some of them have brains and are not impatient, and can wait until stocks of information, bought long, rise in the market. The real financier in the market, and in life, is the one who knows when to sell, but never sells "short."

The maid came to the judge's side. "I will not need you any more to-night, Kitty," he said, in a voice a little too

## THE MAJESTY OF THE LAW

soft and endearing for a respectable society man to use to a female employee. "I guess you had better turn in."

"Yes, sir," responded Kitty, arching her eyebrows. "Good night, sir."

"I am always careful not to discuss business before servants," the judge volunteered, after Kitty had gone. "One can never tell when it may fall on fertile ground and blossom into trouble. There is nothing like caution."

A trim little doll of a maid smiled sarcastically as she pressed a pink ear closer to the keyhole.

"Well, let's get down to business," suggested Schmitt, glancing at his watch. "I am frank to say I do not like the affair. It will be an impossibility to fix the grand jury, and I cannot risk tampering with a trial jury. You know what *nearly* happened in the Brady case. If it were anything else but murder, or, at the best, manslaughter, I could fix it up. There are two alternatives. Get him sent up for manslaughter, and after a few years work a pardon by pulling the proper strings. If Hendricks gets in as Governor, it will be easy to get a pardon in a year's time, but you know as well as I that he hasn't a chance of being elected. No such luck. The other way is to promise him a pardon in a few months' time if he pleads guilty and keeps his mouth shut. Then railroad him to Sing Sing for the limit and I can fix it so he never will be heard from. Do you want to double cross him or are you on the square with him?"

"I don't give a damn what happens to him," returned Davis, "just so we can sew up his mouth. The sky's the limit. Croak him if necessary."

"Of course, the last suggestion is out of the question. Let me see. Sometime to-morrow afternoon I can arrange it so he will be sent to the Tombs to await the action of the grand jury. That will give us to-morrow morning to

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

put the issue up to him. What is it to be, a pardon or a case of plain railroading?"

"Oh, I guess we had better give him a chance, if it can be worked. Get him a pardon and he will be useful to us when he gets out. He's a clever kid until he's coked to the eyes. It's the first time he's pulled a bone. Go after the pardon, Judge. That is, if he comes through on the quiet stuff."

"All right, pardon it is," rejoined Schmitt, again glancing at the time. "I'll draft his confession to-night, and it's up to you people to get him to sign it in the morning. How's Mulvaney working? I think it's about time to get him that inspectorship. We can use him. Coley's going stale, and it won't hurt to break him to make room for Mulvaney."

"Mulvaney's O. K., but I'd go easy about handing so much out to him for a while. It might spoil him."

"Perhaps you are right," assented the judge, after a few seconds' thought. "It won't do to rush things. Now, about the fee. I'll need at least twenty thousand. You see, prices are going up. It takes a little more than it used to."

The price the judge named made Davis open his eyes to their fullest extent. But he was powerless. If the judge said twenty thousand, twenty thousand it was. He could not afford to dicker with him, but it meant that five thousand would have to come out of his personal bank roll and he did not relish the idea.

"It's a little steep, Judge," he ventured, "but twenty thousand it is. I'll get it for you to-morrow after I see Harding. However, it's his business. The twenty comes out of the drug graft, but I'm stung for five of it out of my rake-off."

"When you see Harding, tell him to go a little easy,"

## THE MAJESTY OF THE LAW

urned Schmitt. "I've heard rumors, and no matter if is the highly respected president of a chemical company and a member of Trinity, he is not immune. Rumors sometimes lead to unpleasant investigation. But not always," he added, musingly. Davis inwardly agreed with him. "Also tip off Harding that my share is a little late this month."

Davis nodded acquiescence and rose to go. The judge did not detain him, because he had two important duties that night. First, he had to take out Nannette, of the Firefly Dance, to a quiet little supper in a quiet little place, and after that he had to draft Johnny Muldoon's confession of murder. You see, the judge was a hard and conscientious worker.

Davis poured out a good-sized drink and, saluting the judge by lifting the glass in his direction, drank it at a gulp.

As the front door closed behind him, a trim little maid darted from behind the curtains of the door leading to the room in which they had been talking and tiptoed cautiously up the steps leading to her back room on the top floor.

Davis hurried to a telephone and called Mulvaney. The captain was expecting the call, and eagerly inquired results of the conference. Twice in his life he had been honored by meeting the judge, and stood in great awe of him. Davis gave no information over the phone, but directed that he meet him right away at Starkey's, in the upstairs back room.

When Davis arrived the captain was waiting impatiently for him. Davis told him that part of his interview with the judge which he wished him to know. He did not believe in taking anyone entirely into his confidence, not even the judge.

The captain listened without interruption, but by the

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

expression of his face it was easy to see a great load had been lifted from his mind. He had absolute confidence in the abilities of the judge and Davis.

"All right," he replied, when Davis had finished. "It's no more dope for him to-night. If he's coked up perhaps he'll balk at signing the confession, and then everything 'll be balled up again. Without the stuff he'll feel pretty shaky in the mornin' and he'll sign anything for another shot. They don't use their think tanks when they're cravin' the snow."

"Don't trust it to anyone else," enjoined Davis. "You'd better stay on the job yourself to-night, Mulvaney, and keep an eye open that none of it reaches him. If you want me, I'll be at Murray's, taking a turn at the wheel. I'll be on the job in the morning to have a talk with Muldoon about signing."

"All right, Chief. Good night." And Mulvaney left for the police station to watch over the welfare of sleeping New York. You see, he was a servant of the people, and their safekeeping was in his hands.

Davis repaired immediately to Murray's, where he hoped to win enough at roulette to prevent a certain impending dent in his bank roll.

On a bench in a cell of the —th Precinct police station, Johnny Muldoon, carried by the swift wings of cocaine, rolled rapidly back the years and dreamed he was a baby resting on his mother's breast. The hard wooden bench changed to a soft, undulating bosom, and the rough, cursing voice of a drunk in the next cell was a crooning lullaby. What cared he if the bough should break and the cradle fall?

## XIV

### WEBER'S VAUDEVILLE HOUSE

MRS. HENDERSON looked up from her task of peeling potatoes for supper. "Don't you think we should celebrate to-night?" she inquired, casually, trying hard to restrain her eagerness. "You know it ain't every day one o' this family grabs all the honors at school."

"I knew you had something up your sleeve," answered Mollie, her face beaming. "You can't fool me, mother. Now what is it? What is the surprise you are saving for me?"

"I guess my secret will keep until after supper," laughed Mrs. Henderson, blushing like a schoolgirl detected in some act by her teacher. "Stick on your hat and run down to the corner an' get some milk, but before you go just take a peep in the ice box."

Mollie ran to the ice box, lifted the lid, and eagerly peered in. "Oysters!" exclaimed she, excitedly. "And a whole quart of them, too. Mother, you're a dear. But aren't they awfully expensive?"

"Sure they cost a lot of money, but that don't matter," replied Mrs. Henderson, eyes twinkling. "To-night we celebrate, and the sky's the limit. But that ain't all. Them's *fryin'* oysters. Take one up an' look at it. I 'ain't never seen no oysters bigger than them, an' they're fresh, too. Got 'em at Schwartz's. I 'ain't got no use for the Dutch, but I will say Schwartz does keep fine oysters."



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Hurry back from the store, an' don't forget to get some cracker dust, because we're goin' to *fry* 'em."

Mollie needed no second invitation to hurry. The thought of fried oysters was enough to lend wings to any feet. On her way back from the store she thought of Mary Ryan. Did Mary Ryan like fried oysters? Of course she did! Was there anyone in this world who didn't like them? If she could only invite Mary to supper, what a treat it would be for her! She ran up the two flights of stairs, her dainty feet hardly touching the steps, to ask her mother if she could invite Mary; but the table was already set for three.

Mrs. Henderson noticed Mollie's look of glad surprise as she glanced inquiringly at the three plates on the table. "Now, honey," she chuckled, "before you take your hat off, just run over to Mary's and tell her to come to supper. There's plenty for the three of us."

"You're just the sweetest mother in this whole world," exclaimed Mollie between kisses. "Yes, you are," and then she darted through the door and downstairs on her errand.

Mary Ryan needed no urging when the magic words, "fried oysters," were whispered in her ear.

Never before was there such a supper as on that night.

"Have some more, Mollie," insisted her mother, proudly. "Come on, Mary; you're losing your appetite. Mollie's one ahead of you. They've just got to be et to keep from wastin'."

When the last oyster had disappeared, Mollie and Mary began to clear away the dishes. They were soon piled neatly in the sink and the girls were matching straws to see who should wipe and who should wash, when Mrs. Henderson fired her final shot.

"There ain't goin' to be no dishes washed this night,"

## WEBER'S VAUDEVILLE HOUSE

she announced. "Didn't I tell you we was goin' to celebrate? Well, just come here and cast your lamps on what I got."

She fumbled in her dress and extracted three oblong cardboards. The two girls tried excitedly to see what she had, but Mrs. Henderson held them over her head out of reach, and with the dignity and majesty of a queen who is about to impart welcome news of state to her retinue she said, in an imperious tone:

"They are three seats for the show to-night at Weber's Vaudeville House, and they ain't for the gallery, neither. They're *front row* orchestra seats, and right in the center, too."

The girls gasped. The best seats they had ever enjoyed were far back in the balcony. But these were in the *front row*, and *downstairs*, too. It was unbelievable, and at *Weber's*. It had always been their ambition to go to Weber's, and now it was to be realized. It was almost too good to be true.

They examined the bits of cardboard with a reverence that was pathetic. Mrs. Henderson was in her glory. She was as excited as the girls, but tried hard to appear calm. Mollie's heart was thumping. At last she was to see real high-class vaudeville. Twice before she had been to a vaudeville performance at one of the cheaper houses, but had sat so far back that the actors appeared small and unreal, but now she was going to see them only a few feet from her. She could hardly breathe. Why should she be affected this way? Perhaps she had eaten too many oysters. It had always been her secret ambition to go on the stage, but she had kept it studiously to herself. Blood will tell.

Mary had gone to tell her mother of the good news and had promised to meet them at the front door. With a

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

start, Mollie came to herself and got ready hurriedly. Entering her bedroom, she glanced slyly in the mirror and must have been pleased at the reflection, because a smile of satisfaction suffused her face. This going to the show was an event in her life. She was not going to be like the rest of the audience, simply *entertained*. She would live every moment with the actors, breathe with them, their applause would be her applause. The rays of the footlights meant the sunshine of her life, her ambition, her career.

With her hat in her hand she paused before the mirror. If she could only wear her hair "up" for this occasion. Why wasn't she a few years older? And if she only dared to put just a touch of rouge on her face, like Rosa Freschi. With a sigh, she put on her hat. Perhaps it would be better, after all, to wait. Father Time never changed his schedule. She would just *have* to wait, that was all there was to it.

Before leaving her room she opened a drawer of the cheap dresser, and, taking from it a photo of her mother dressed in stage costume, she gazed at it fondly.

"Hurry up, Mollie!" called Mrs. Henderson from the kitchen. "If we get there a little early, we'll be able to see the last part of the first show, and get more 'n our money's worth."

Thus admonished, Mollie hurriedly, but lovingly, kissed the photo. "Mother dear," she whispered to it, "you are going to the show with me, and some day I'm going to be nearly as great an actress as you were." Then she placed the photo tenderly in her bosom.

Mary was waiting impatiently for them at the door. With a girl on each side of her, Mrs. Henderson was hustled along until, almost breathless, she stopped.

"Now, look here, girls," she exclaimed, "ease up a bit!

## WEBER'S VAUDEVILLE HOUSE

I ain't as young as I used to be. The show ain't goin' to run away. We'll get there in plenty of time."

Mollie was all impatience when she arrived at Weber's. The lobby was crowded with people waiting to buy tickets. Jake Weber was standing near the ticket office, surveying the long line with inner satisfaction. The years had been kind to Jake because, with the exception of a completely bald head and a large waist line, their effect was hardly apparent. But time had wrought a great change in his theater, for Jake, having prospered, had used a large per cent of his prosperity to enlarge and beautify his house. It now ranked as the leading East Side vaudeville theater.

Mollie, although a little nervous from excitement, was bursting with pride. An impressive figure dressed in a uniform resplendent with gold trimmings was admonishing the people in a singsong voice: "Don't crowd. There's plenty o' room inside. People with reserved seats pass right in."

Mollie, on pins and needles, could hear the music inside. She did not want to waste a precious second. Gradually, step by step, they arrived at the entrance, where a majestic doorman took their three cardboards and in an indifferent manner, which failed to lower Mollie's pride, tore them apart and handed back the seat numbers with a curt, "Center aisle, front row!"

She could not help glancing at the people behind her at those magic words, "Center aisle, front row!" If Rosa Freschi could only see her now!

An usher took the three pasteboards and hurried them down the aisle, then, with no regard for the act on the stage, banged three seats down, handed them their coupons and three programs, paused an instant, expectant, but there was no tip coming. "Dead ones!" he muttered as he hurried up the aisle to look for "live ones."

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Mollie seated herself first, Mrs. Henderson was next, and then came Mary. A troupe of performing dogs was doing the bidding of a lady dressed in a costume covered with silver spangles. Mollie was entranced, but her enjoyment was rudely interrupted by a touch on the shoulder, followed by a gruff voice from a seat behind her:

"Hey! D'you think my old man is a glazier? I can't see through that hat."

Blushing furiously, she quickly removed the offending hat. "I guess your old man is a bum, by the way his son talks," retorted Mrs. Henderson, overhearing the remark and coming to Mollie's rescue.

She was rewarded for her thrust by a titter of approval from the people about her, but she also removed her hat, and touched Mary on the arm to do likewise.

With a blare of the orchestra the lady of the silver spangles bowed to the audience and, amid a roar of applause, the curtain came down.

It was the end of the first show. The house lights came up and the majority of the audience arose to leave. Two pages darted from the wings, placed "Intermission" cards on the easels, and as quickly disappeared.

During the intermission Mrs. Henderson and Mary kept up a continual chatter, paying no attention to the orchestra, but Mollie, enraptured with the music, did not join in the conversation. Mrs. Henderson noticed her abstraction and was pleased. She realized Mollie was thoroughly enjoying herself and it was well worth her extravagance for the tickets. The cost of the tickets was really a serious inroad on her resources, but the morrow could take care of itself; to-night she was going to enjoy herself, and wanted the others to do likewise.

Mollie gazed with awe at the leader of the orchestra,

## WEBER'S VAUDEVILLE HOUSE

and dreamed of the time when he would be wielding that baton to *her* singing and dancing. The music ceased.

The pages changed the cards on the easels. This time they read, "The Musical Mahoneys." A light flashed over the leader's music. With his wand he tapped lightly on the green tin shade of his lamp; the orchestra came to attention, adjusted their instruments, and fixed their eyes on their leader. With a dip of his magic wand they commenced playing. The curtain rolled up slowly and the performance was on.

Act followed act in quick succession—all too quickly for Mollie. As each ended she sighed involuntarily, realizing it brought her one big night nearer its close.

The page boys placed cards on the easels reading "Mills & Murtha." Mollie's heart beat high. "Mills & Murtha" were not on the program; they must be an added attraction. They certainly were going to get more than their money's worth.

But what was this? Some one not made up, and who positively could not be an actor, was speaking from the stage:

"Ladies and gentlemen, owing to the sudden illness of Nannette, the famous Firefly dancer, Mr. Weber, in order to follow out his policy of fair treatment to the patrons of his theater, at great expense has substituted 'Mills and Murtha' in her place. I take great—"

"Tell it to the marines!" came a voice from the gallery. The rest of his speech was drowned in a roar of laughter from the house. Bowing as gracefully as possible under the circumstances, the speaker hurriedly retreated to the wings, where he was met by Tom Mills, who had been drinking and was swaying unsteadily.

"Hey, you!" he blurted. "Ain't it bad enough to be

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

jerked on here at ten minutes' notice without you crabbin' the whole act by—"

"Aw, shut up!" retorted the angry announcer. "Your act was crabbed when it was written."

Tom Mills was about to make a heated rejoinder, but the orchestra played his entrance cue, so, hand in hand with a pretty blonde attired in pink chiffon, and a strained stage smile on his face, he tripped gayly on to the stage.

The audience was not any too pleased at the substitution of the act, so "Mills & Murtha" had to be exceptionally good to get by. The benefit of the doubt would not go their way, either.

The years had made their mark on Tom Mills. His face was lined with furrows of dissipation and he had slowed up considerably in his dancing. His voice, although still fairly good, was beginning to give distress signals, and he knew it would not be long before he would have to rely entirely on his partner. But, as is usual with his type, instead of heeding these warning signals and trying to conserve his talents by moderating his excesses, he indulged the more freely. He reasoned that the magic make-up box was always at his disposal, and grease paint can cover twenty years of aging.

Of course, *off* the boards, grease paint could not help him, but to him it didn't matter. He made his money *on* the boards, and spent it while off. As yet he had found no difficulty in picking up a "dame" when he so desired, and saloons served their drinks, no matter how bad a man looked; that is, if the man had money to spend.

His partner, Melody Murtha, was clever, had a good voice, and knew how to perform, and, what was more to the point with him, she had no foolish ideas of virtue, so he should worry.

As long as she was good he could afford to slip a little.

## WEBER'S VAUDEVILLE HOUSE

With clever "stalling" he would be able to carry the act over for another season—that is, if he did not in the meantime meet a dame he thought more of. That was his greatest drawback, changing dames. If he could only be like some of the rest and stick to one. But what was the use of wishing? It wouldn't help matters.

Their first song was good, and the fickle audience, forgetting its resentment at the substitution, applauded roundly. Then Tom Mills entered for a single while Melody Murtha changed costumes. He came to the center of the stage, sat in a chair, and commenced a half-singing, half-spoken recitation, entitled, "It isn't what you used to be; it's what you are to-day."

Mollie in her seat in the front row was directly in front of him, and gazed up into his face with rapt attention, drinking in each word as it was uttered. Mills at first did not notice her look, but, suddenly seeing her face, he leaned a little forward, turned his gaze away, puzzled, then again focused his eyes on hers. He faltered in his lines, stammered, then, by an effort, recovered his poise and continued with his recitation, but without taking his eyes from Mollie's face.

He was fascinated, as if gazing into a face of the dead. Finishing, he made his exit awkwardly amid a few catcalls from the gallery.

His partner, Melody Murtha, waiting her entrance in the wings, was biting her lips with rage. "What the hell's the matter with you?" she shrilled, as Mills staggered past her. "Snap out of it."

Mills continued to his dressing room in a daze. What was the matter with him? All upset because in the audience he had seen a face which resembled a girl he used to act with. True, he *had* given her a rough deal, but he hadn't *murdered* her. He reached into his overcoat pocket



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

and brought out a bottle of whisky. The cork turned suddenly into the face of Mollie Eastman. Mills shrank back. The doctor had warned him to lay off "booze," or he would have the "willies." Perhaps this was the start of them.

He had seen the face of Mollie Eastman. But that was impossible, because Short had told him confidentially years ago that she had been killed in an accident. But it was her face, all right—the same look, those innocent blue eyes. Ah, he had it! It was her child. He sighed with relief. Come to think of it, it *was* a kid's face, after all.

Trying to convince himself that it did not matter, he turned to "booze" for support and strength. He shuddered convulsively as the alcohol burned its way down his throat. Then, bracing his shoulders as if ready to face hell itself, he hurried with his change.

Melody Murtha met with an outburst of applause when she had finished. Tom Mills was waiting for her in the wings for their final song and dance. The applause she received was so great that she had to make three bows before the audience was appeased.

"Been hittin' the stuff again, have you?" she threatened Mills between her bows. "Well, queer our next number and, believe me, you'll get yours."

They entered for their final. Mills tried hard not to look in the direction of Mollie, but something stronger than his will, even though reinforced by whisky, drew his gaze and riveted it on her face. This time he imagined he saw *two* Mollies. The faces were looking up at him. He forgot his cues and steps. Melody was boiling over.

"Snap out of it," she whispered under her breath. "You big boob, we're goin' flat."

Her remark braced Mills momentarily, but the two faces were still in front of him. He broke down entirely. Amid

## WEBER'S VAUDEVILLE HOUSE

the jeers of the audience, Melody Murtha ran from the stage.

Mills stood for a second, helpless. The house was in an uproar. The curtain was rung down on him. Melody, with tears of rage coursing down her cheeks, cursed him from the wings.

The management put on the next and final act and the audience soon forgot the incident.

Mollie was suffering as much as Tom Mills. She could not understand it. His look had made her uncomfortable; she felt as if she had been gazing into the eyes of a snake. Mrs. Henderson had been a close observer of the whole affair, and her mind was working rapidly.

Perhaps here was a cue to the mystery of Mollie Eastman's disappearance. Apparently Mills had known the mother, and the likeness of the child had unnerved him. But why? Ah! She had it! No doubt he knew of, and perhaps was responsible for, the mother's disappearance, hence his strange behavior. Anyway, it would not hurt to do a little investigating on her own hook. No doubt Mr. Weber would be able to give her Mills's address. She would attend to it the first thing in the morning. She would send Mollie over to Mary Ryan's to get her out of the way.

Back stage, Tom Mills was having a rough time.

"Such a bum act I never saw." Jake Weber was speaking. "What is it the matter with you? For years you been playing, and now you make a bum outa me. Don't never come into this house again." Swearing disgustedly, he left the dressing room.

Melody Murtha then had her inning.

"You're a fine piece of cheese to be teamed up with, you are. I'm through. You not only made a bum out o' the house, but you've queered me, too. A sweet chance

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

we've got of getting any more bookings. It's ten to one Haller over in Brooklyn cancels our engagement. *Our* engagement! I mean *my* engagement. You *would* stick to that 'rotgut' until it bumped you. So long! I've quit for good."

She opened the dressing-room door to leave, and Mills looked at her drunkenly. Melody paused, giving him a chance to plead with her to stay. Angry as she was, a little coaxing would have done the trick. But Tom, instead of pleading, blinked his eyes and muttered, "Go to hell!"

Melody left, slamming the door with a bang. Mills gazed stupidly at the closed door.

"They've all got 'em," he mused, aloud. "Guess I'll have to hustle now for a new one, but my nerve's gone. I gotta cut out the booze 'cause I'm beginnin' to see things. Damn queer, them two faces."

Despite his words, he turned to his friend, John Barley-corn, for solace. Braced, he daubed his fingers in the cold cream preparatory to removing the grease paint, his protector against the ravages of time and dissipation.

## XV

### MOLLIE TAKES A PARTNER

**W**HEN the curtain rang down on the last act, Mollie realized her big night was over. The land of her dreams, which had seemed so real to her during the performance, was now fading into far-away uncertainty, the future. A chasm was widening gradually between the footlights and her, the goal of her ambition. The only way of crossing to the other side was over a bridge constructed by time, and, realizing that time was a slow builder, she sighed.

Mrs. Henderson was watching her out of the corner of her eye, and, hearing her sigh, her heart went out to the girl. This strengthened her determination to get in touch with Tom Mills, to try and unravel the mystery connected with her mother's disappearance.

Although Mrs. Henderson believed that Mrs. Eastman had wilfully deserted her child, still the love for Mollie had softened her resentment greatly, and at times had forced her to doubt that the mother of such a sweet girl could be guilty of desertion.

She had fought valiantly against her doubts and had mustered her hard East Side reasoning to her help, but each battle had ended in favor of the mother.

On the way home, Mary Ryan was bubbling over with enthusiasm, but Mollie and Mrs. Henderson were silent. They were thinking of the absent one.

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

They left Mary at her door, amid profuse thanks for the wonderful time they had given her. Once home, they took off their things in silence. Neither wished to be the first to speak, although they knew that they were going to talk of things which had been studiously avoided in the past.

"Mother," said Mollie, "now that I have finished school, I want to talk to you about something which has been on my mind for a long time. Let's sit down at the table. Come on."

"I intended to have a talk with you to-night," returned Mrs. Henderson, seating herself beside Mollie, "but somehow or other I didn't know how to begin; but you've made it easy for me. You often asked me questions I couldn't, or wouldn't, answer, and I promised I'd tell you when you finished school. Well, the time's arrived, so I guess I'd better get it off my chest. Perhaps some of the things I'm going to say 'll hurt you, and perhaps you won't like me no more"—she rubbed a tear out of the corner of her eye—"but I hope you'll believe me when I say I love you more than anything I've ever loved in my life. I ain't much at ooncealin' things, and I always has spoke my mind, so I'm goin' to do it now."

A pressure from Mollie's hand assured her that her love was returned. This was a little too much for her, because she got up and walked to the sink so the tears in her eyes could not be seen. Pretending to take a drink of water, she wiped her eyes, and returned to her chair.

"Mother, I haven't been blind," said Mollie. "I know the hard time you've had to keep things going and to send me to school. Now that I have graduated, I realize it is up to me to help support the house, and I'm going to do it, too. That's what I want to talk about"—a hesitating pause, and she continued—"and—and I want to

## MOLLIE TAKES A PARTNER

know the truth about my mother. The children on the street poke fun at me and insult me when they get mad, and—and I can't stand it much longer."

"All right, Mollie dear, I'll be frank with you. At present there ain't much to worry about as far as the house is concerned. When the old man died I collected his insurance. It was pretty hard keepin' up, but somehow I always managed to scrape enough together to meet the payments. There's about a thousand left in the savings bank, because I never touched much of it, only when I was up against it proper. What with getting my rent free for keepin' the halls clean, and the money I gets washin' and ironin', we can pull through.

"Of course it will help if you can get a job where you won't have to work too hard, because I've got to keep enough in the bank to bury me when I'm dead. I don't want to be laid away by the city. My mother and father are in Potter's Field, and I've always dreamed of the day when I can have their bodies removed to a decent cemetery."

The tears were running down Mollie's face. "Don't speak of dying, mother dear. You are going to live a long time yet, and we will enjoy ourselves, because I'm going to make lots of money, and we're going to move to the West Side and be rich."

At Mollie's hopeful words Mrs. Henderson smiled doubtfully. She remembered the day, years ago, when a similar conversation had taken place between her mother and her, when she had, with childish hope, promised the same things Mollie was promising. In her heart she knew how futile Mollie's promises were, how impossible of fulfillment.

"Now, Mollie," she sighed, "let's hope these grand things come to pass, but we'll never get them by *wishin'*."

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

I 'ain't got no desire to *live* on the West Side, but when I die I wouldn't mind *restin'* on the West Side in some swell cemetery."

Mollie patted her hand lovingly. She knew what was coming.

"I'm goin' to tell you about your mother because I think you are old enough to judge for yourself."

She put her arm around Mollie's shoulder, and in a trembling voice related the incidents of her mother's disappearance, being careful to omit certain incidents which might have reflected on her character.

It was past one o'clock when she had finished. Mollie drew the face of the elder woman to her and kissed her tenderly on the mouth and eyes, and then went into the bedroom. Mrs. Henderson did not follow immediately; she wanted her to be alone with her thoughts.

Mollie turned up the gas, took her mother's photo from her bosom, placed it on the bed in front of her, and knelt down. "Dear God," she prayed, "if you haven't been kind to my mother, now's your chance to make up for it. If she's alive, you've just got to take care of her until I find her. Dear God, I've never been to church and I don't know much about you, and Mrs. Henderson hasn't an awful lot of faith in you, but from what I have heard you are a square dealer. You stick with me and I'll do anything you say, if it will help my mother. Amen."

She then crept into bed with her photo, called a "Good night, mother!" to Mrs. Henderson, and was soon fast asleep, secure in the knowledge that she had added a powerful ally to her cause. From then on she had a partner who by reputation was known to be a "sticker."

## XVI

### STRIKING OUT

**T**HE next morning, after the breakfast dishes had been cleared away, Mrs. Henderson suggested that Mollie run over to Mary Ryan's, and, with her, look for something to do in the department stores. Mollie put on her hat excitedly and, kissing her mother good-by, hurried down the stairs.

"Good luck!" called the other after her. "Don't take anything payin' more than seventy-five a week!"

Mary Ryan was as anxious as Mollie to look for work. Compelled to attend school against her wishes, striking out for herself was like going on a vacation. The two sat on the front steps of the tenement house in which Mary lived, planning how they could cover the most places with the least expenditure of car fare.

Mary suggested they ride uptown and walk back, stopping at stores on their way. By this method they would be near enough home to get their lunch, which would mean a saving of fifteen cents each. When their route was outlined to their complete satisfaction, they started on their mission, hope beating high in their hearts.

At the first two places they received a curt "No," but this did not discourage them in the least. Before entering the third place they held a consultation.

"I've got it!" exclaimed Mary. "We've got to change our dope. So far I've done the talking while you faded out. This time I'm the one to fade out and you make the



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

spiel. You see, you're a good looker, got me skinned a city block. Let's vamp 'em! With your looks you oughta be able to bowl over the first guy we meet. Is it a go, Mollie?"

"I'm game if you are," assented Mollie. "Let's rehearse. You be the fellow that gives out jobs, and I'll be the meek and mild. Here goes." She put her finger to her mouth and curtsied to an imaginary employer.

"Mister, we are two young girls, just graduated with high honors from public school. We can recite 'The Lady of the Lake' backward, therefore there should be an opening for us in the hosiery department."

"Nothin' doin'," objected Mary. "You've got the wrong angle. Go at 'em this way: 'Pardon me, mister, but that's a peach of a tie you're wearing; just matches your suit. You certainly have grand taste.' Now supposin' he falls for the blarney," she explained to Mollie, "hit the iron while it's red. Somethin' like this: 'You see, we had a job offered us in the chorus of a traveling show, but our mothers got wise and spiked the deal. But, being sort of independent and not carin' to be jerked through life on the end of a string, we packed our duds and here we are, lookin' for a job with some pep in it. Of course we know we *look* young, but looks are deceiving. Just give us a trial and I'll bet before the week's out you'll sit up and take notice—that is, of course, if you'll give us a job where we can be near *you*. Do you know, you made an instant hit with us. We just *dote* on correctly dressed men.'"

"Mollie, if that don't land 'em I'm a bad guesser. But *you'll* have to carry it through. Me tryin' to vamp a man is like a wet hen proposin' to a peacock."

"All right, Mary," agreed Mollie, smiling in spite of herself. "I'll do my best. You pick out the fellow, and I'll do the vamping."

## STRIKING OUT

Their campaign laid out, they entered the employees' entrance with bits in their teeth.

After Mollie had been gone an hour, Mrs. Henderson repaired to Weber's Vaudeville House and, after a tiresome wait, managed to get an interview with Mr. Weber. He did not know the address of Tom Mills, and did not want to be bothered about such a "goniff," but if Mrs. Henderson would call at Short's Booking Agency, he thought she would be able to locate him.

At the agency she was informed by Pete Short that Mills had left for Boston without leaving his address, and that he was not expected to return. Discouraged, she returned home.

As she left his office, Short called in Tom Mills, who had been waiting in another room. "Now look here, Tom," he chuckled, "I'm gettin' tired of stalling off your landladies. Why don't you pay your rent occasionally?"

At home, Mrs. Henderson found two very excited and happy girls waiting for her with the good news that they had landed jobs. Mary was a cash girl at four dollars a week, while Mollie had been hired in the music department to demonstrate popular songs at the princely wage of ten dollars per week. Mary related enthusiastically how Mollie had posed as a singer when she heard there was a vacancy for a demonstrator. After "vamping" the boss, she had persuaded him to give her voice a trial.

The piano player had rehearsed a song with her for nearly ten minutes, and then called the floorwalker over to listen. Mollie had made an instant hit, and the floorwalker—mind you, the *floorwalker*—said she had a beautiful voice and that with proper training she could go into *grand opera*.

Mrs. Henderson was delighted, and Mollie's promises of the night before assumed a real value.

## XVII

### THE SCALES OF JUSTICE

**C**APTAIN MULVANEY spent a restless night at his desk. His brain was a whirlpool. Everything went round and round in a constantly narrowing circle. First he saw, in the hazy distance, Johnny Muldoon dripping with blood. Then Davis appeared, arm in arm with the judge. Then they clasped hands with Muldoon and round and round they circled like children playing ring-a-rosy.

His eyes closed gradually, dizzy from the fast-wheeling figures, and his head sank slowly to his chest. Then the clanking of a cell door as the keeper made his rounds startled him into wakefulness.

The ticking of the clock over the desk was thunder in his ears. He sat up, blinking, and with his hands tried to rub his thoughts away, but to no avail. In a few seconds the figures started again on their dizzy revolutions. Twice the night sergeant tiptoed into his room, gave an earnest look at the captain, then, shaking his head, tiptoed silently out.

There was something ominous in the air, an oppressive lull like the forerunner of a squall at sea. The silence hurt. A patrolman brought in a drunk. The captain entered his record mechanically on the blotter, and again reverted to his thoughts.

Supposing Davis and the judge should fail and Johnny

## THE SCALES OF JUSTICE

Muldoon squealed, it meant that years of hard work and plotting had come to naught. His right hand slowly opened the door of his desk and took from it a little round pill box. Why shouldn't he give it to Muldoon? No one would be the wiser. In his boyhood he had read in a book of the sea that dead men tell no tales.

But even if Muldoon did "croak," he would be no better off. It would only be putting him in the power of Davis and the judge. He would always have to be their tool, and then what would become of his secret ambition to rule *them*? If he could only get them in *his* power, how he would make *them* squeal for mercy. No, it was better to wait and trust to luck. Arriving at this conclusion, he rose and proceeded to Muldoon's cell. Johnny was sleeping peacefully. He glared down at him, puzzled. "The poor dope's got a smile on his face," he muttered.

Mulvaney stood gazing at the sleeping face. The smile changed to a sneer. This angered him, and, with a curse, he stooped over and struck the sleeping man in the mouth with his fist. The head rocked back and the body stirred uneasily. The bleeding lips twitched and muttered, "Mother!" and the sneer changed back to the smile.

Mulvaney stepped back, horrified, and, like a drunken man, staggered from the cell to his desk.

The turnkey, before locking the cell door after the retreating captain, reached for his handkerchief and wiped the blood tenderly from Muldoon's lips, picked up his coat, which had fallen to the floor, rolled it carefully, and placed it under the sleeping head for a pillow. He had known Johnny's father in bygone days, at the corner saloon, when Johnny was a youngster. Johnny had a friend at court, and he needed a friend.

Around seven o'clock in the morning Davis entered the station house in a very bad humor. The "wheel," instead

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

of filling the dent in his bank roll, had enlarged it considerably.

"Well?" he interrogated, glaring at Mulvaney.

"He 'ain't come to yet," gloomed the captain. "Must have had a pretty heavy shot."

"I've got the fake confession in my pocket," growled Davis. "The judge sent it over to the roulette game. It's dated yesterday. Better get Muldoon to sign it while we've got the chance. The judge ain't comin' over—thinks it's best for him not to be seen, and I guess he's right. He says to get it signed and he'll attend to the rest. He's got everything fixed to railroad it through. We've got to have a witness, and *my* name don't go down on paper. Got anybody round here you can trust?"

"Old Williams is in there," droned the captain. "He'll do for a witness because he's brainless and won't know what he's signing—almost as blind as a bat. I just keep him around here to be handy in cases like this."

"Well," ordered Davis, irritably, "get him out here and wise him up, because they're liable to ask him questions and he'd better be posted. It's best to be on the safe side and take no chances."

The captain sent for Williams, the turnkey. Davis nodded a slight recognition to the old man, and, drawing the confession from his pocket, handed it to the captain. "You two had better read it over," he suggested, "and then let Williams sign it as witness down in the corner, where it says 'witness.'"

The old man fumblingly adjusted his glasses and, peering over the captain's shoulder, read the confession. The captain handed him a pen and showed him where to sign. Williams dipped the pen in the ink, but paused.

"Well, what's the matter?" hissed the captain. "Why don't you sign it?"

## THE SCALES OF JUSTICE

"Muldoon hasn't signed it yet," faltered the old man. "How can I witness his signature?"

The captain, in anger, snatched the confession from him and pointed to a notary's signature and seal. "If a notary public attests it's all right," he snarled, "what kick have you got about signing it?"

Williams vouchsafed no reply, but signed his name and turned to leave, but Davis touched him on the arm and pressed a twenty-dollar bill into his hand. The turnkey accepted the money in silence and returned to his duty.

"It's about time you got some one around here who's not so damned noseey," grouched Davis to the captain.

"Don't worry about Williams," protested Mulvaney. "Ten minutes from now he'll forget all about signing it. That twenty fixed him. A neat touch, Davis."

"It's those small details that put me where I am," returned Davis proudly, his vanity tickled.

Old Williams noiselessly unlocked the door to Muldoon's cell, then looked cautiously down the corridor to see if the coast was clear. Satisfied, he entered and inserted the twenty-dollar bill which Davis had given him in Johnny's pocket.

"Johnny," he gloomed, "that's their first payment on what they owe you." With a pitying glance at the helpless form, he withdrew.

At the far end of the corridor, under the gaslight, he extracted a small notebook from his pocket and jotted down the date of the confession, the time signed, and the name of the crooked notary public.

"I guess Kitty knows what she's talking about," he chortled, checking his entries. "Everything's working out as she said. She's a clever girl, but I'd better get her out of the judge's house before it's too late. Her dead mother would never forgive me if harm came to her."

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Never mind, Johnny. You may be up against it, but when old Williams gets ready to speak, things are going to take a turn."

"Williams," called the captain, entering the corridor with Davis, "unlock Muldoon's cell. We want to look him over."

The old man, startled, secreted his notebook, and, ambling down the corridor, unlocked the door.

"Better send him away?" whispered Davis to Mulvaney, jerking his thumb at the turnkey.

"He's all right," returned Mulvaney. "Doesn't even know what's going on."

"Get up, Muldoon. I want to speak to you," ordered Davis, gruffly, stooping over the sleeping body.

No answer from Johnny.

"Been pulling the rough stuff on him?" queried Davis, noticing the bruised lips.

"No; he got that last night," lied Mulvaney, uneasily. "Fell off the bench in his sleep. Had a devil of a time getting him back on it."

Williams smiled sarcastically.

Davis spoke to Muldoon two or three times, but received no answer; then, getting angry, he jerked him roughly. Johnny groaned, rubbed his eyes, and sat up, staring vacantly. The cocaine was dying out. Not recognizing Davis, he sank back into his lying position, but Davis caught him by the shirt collar and shook him violently. Johnny waved a protesting hand in front of him, as if brushing away some buzzing insect. The captain came to the assistance of Davis, and between them they got Johnny to his feet and dragged him into the captain's office and sat him in a chair before the desk. At first Johnny was oblivious to his surroundings, but soon began to tremble all over. Davis knew the signs and

## THE SCALES OF JUSTICE

whispered to the captain to hurry up, before Muldoon's hand became too unsteady to hold a pen.

The captain placed a couple of blank pieces of paper in front of him and pressed the pen into his yielding hand. "Hurry up, Johnny," he said, "and sigh these dope slips. I'm going to send for some snow. We both need a shot pretty badly."

Johnny nodded wisely and, with trembling hand, signed his name to the sheet of paper in front of him. The captain removed the sheet quickly and placed the confession in its place.

"Better sign another one, Johnny," he counseled, winking at Davis, "so we'll have enough to last us."

Again Johnny nodded his head sagely and signed the confession in the place designated by the captain. Davis, at the cleverness of Mulvaney, rubbed his hands together with satisfaction, and made a mental note that in the future he would keep a sharp eye on him; he was too clever for safety. Perhaps it would be better if the inspectorship were held back indefinitely.

They helped Johnny to his cell and ordered Williams to join them in the office.

"Williams," asked Mulvaney, as the turnkey entered, "when Muldoon was brought in yesterday and signed that confession, he knew what he was doing, didn't he?"

"Yes, sir."

"And he wasn't coked up very badly, either, was he? You frisked him yourself, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"If you go on the witness stand," queried Davis, assisting in the cross examination, "you can swear what you just said is the truth, can't you?"

"Yes, sir," the old man replied, but this time his eyes narrowed at the corners.



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

The captain waved him away.

"You were right," agreed Davis, as Williams disappeared. "That old bird hasn't enough brains to come in out of the rain."

At the end of the corridor, Williams again smiled and made an entry in his book.

"Well, I'm off to pound my ear," said Davis, yawning sleepily. "'Ain't had a wink of sleep all night. We've both put over some good work and everything's hunky. Muldoon 'll get his, but it's fixed so he'll get out in five or six years, perhaps less. So long. If anything turns up, phone me."

The captain said good-by to Davis, and, taking the pill box of cocaine from his desk, gazed at it curiously, then placed it in his coat pocket and left to sleep the sleep of the just. His fears were at rest. He had done his duty. His night vigil over sleeping New York was ended.

At eleven that morning the "Black Maria" carried a nerveless human form to the Tombs to await trial before the "Scales of Justice."

## XVIII

### MCCANN'S DEPARTMENT STORE

ON the morning they were to commence work in McCann's, Mollie and Mary got up bright and early. They had turned over a page in their lives; they were to be *independent*; school was a thing of the past. At last they had entered into the scheme of things. Their futures lay before them, to be hewed into whatever shapes they desired.

Mollie was shaping the course she would follow; battles were to be won and worlds conquered. Little she recked of adversity; failure was an unknown quantity; success lay before her with an alluring brightness and was beckoning to her to follow—and she *would* follow; nothing could divert *her*.

Of course, many had failed on the road to success, but *she* would pass these wrecks with pity in her heart for them, although it was their own fault. If they had stuck to the course *she* intended to follow, they would have reached their goal.

Mary had no such rosy dreams. She saw before her a life of hard work, with perhaps a lucky chance of marrying some man who would earn enough to keep her in plenty; maybe a fireman, a letter carrier, or, better still, a plumber—one who was *always* sure of good money.

She was waiting for Mollie at her door. They had to be at the department store at eight thirty, and were not

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

going to take chances of being late on this, their first morning of work. No, sir; being early on the job spelled success. They would get there ahead of everyone else, and the boss would see their interest and it would only be a short time before they had left their fellow workers far behind.

It was exactly seven thirty when they boarded a trolley car for McCann's. Arriving at the "Employees' Entrance," the place was deserted, excepting for a porter who was sweeping the sidewalk. There was no boss waiting to commend them for their zeal.

"Good morning," greeted Mollie to the porter, condescendingly. "I suppose you work for McCann's?"

He paused in his work, removed the pipe from his mouth, knocked the ashes out on the palm of his hand, then gave her a sarcastic look and resumed his sweeping.

Mollie blushed to the roots of her hair at his silent rebuke. "I suppose the boss will be along in a few minutes?" she volunteered, nothing daunted. "You know—the gentleman who hires the girls."

"Keep on supposin'. It won't hurt you," returned the porter, without even looking up. "If you're lookin' for a job, you'll grow whiskers waiting for the boss to come in by this entrance."

"Looking for a job!" she exclaimed, indignantly, expecting her reply to turn him to stone. "I should say not! I'll have you understand that we *work* for McCann's."

"Git out o' the way," he ordered. "How 'm I goin' to sweep with the likes o' you clutterin' up the sidewalk? How's it you come down so early? Must o' been up all night."

Mollie saw she was taking the wrong tack with him. "You see, we don't expect to stand still all our lives," she replied. "We're out for a raise."

## McCANN'S DEPARTMENT STORE

"The only raise you'll get will be on the elevator. I've been working here for twelve years, and 'ain't got nary a raise yet."

"Yes, but perhaps you never got here ahead of the rest, and waited for the doors to open."

"Yes, I did once, an' nearly got pinched for loafin'. Now listen, kid. Take a tip from one what knows. Never break your neck to get down early. It ain't appreciated. It only gets you in bad with the rest o' the bunch. The less you do in this store, the more they think of you. That's the line I been followin', and I've held me job for twelve years comin' next March."

"I guess that's the reason you're only a porter," interrupted Mary.

"Then, accordin' to your dope," he replied, "if I had o' come before the store opened, by this time I would own the place." In high disdain he knocked his broom against the curb and disappeared around the corner.

The girls stared sheepishly at each other, then burst out laughing; but, nevertheless, the porter's remarks had made a decided impression and they secretly wished they had not come down so early. Perhaps, after all, they were wrong in their ideas.

The employees of the store commenced to arrive in twos and threes. Mollie and Mary watched the first two girls enter, observed them take cards from a rack, go over to a large clock on the wall, insert the cards, pull down a lever, and return the cards to their original places, then disappear down a long hall.

Not knowing what to do, and afraid to make a break which would betray their ignorance, they watched several more enter, until finally, plucking up courage, they asked an elderly woman if she would direct them where to report.

The woman was very kind, and conducted them to the

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

time clerk's desk. A dapper and overimportant young man received them haughtily, and ordered them to wait until he saw fit to issue time cards to them. It was twenty minutes to nine before they reported for work in their respective departments. Mollie was "called down" by Mr. Johnson, the floorwalker, for being late, and was informed that she had made a bad start.

On the verge of tears, she reported to Bennie Cohen, the piano player.

"What's the matter?" he asked, sympathetically, as she approached, noticing her downcast face. "Seem to have lost some of that pep you were bubblin' yesterday. Did somebody break your doll?"

Mollie did not reply. Bennie grasped her by the hand and led her to the piano.

"Don't pay any attention to Johnson," he whispered. "Since he's been promoted to floorwalker he lives in the moon. Got his raise by beatin' the rest of us down in the mornin' by half an hour. More power to him, I say, but that extra thirty minutes in bed is the best dope for me. Ticklin' the ivories is good enough for yours truly."

Mollie's hopes rose suddenly; after all, she had guessed right; it *did* pay to get down early, and the porter was wrong.

Most of the morning was spent at the music counter sorting sheet music, because, as yet, she had not received instructions to sing. Every time Mr. Johnson, the floorwalker, who got down early in the morning, approached, her heart beat violently, for fear he would ask her to demonstrate a song.

"Look here, kid," advised Bennie, after one of the floorwalker's visits, "forget the panic stuff. In a couple o' days you'll be warblin' so much your pipes 'll be sore.

## McCANN'S DEPARTMENT STORE

When I first tackled the job I felt the same way, but we *professionals* 'ain't got time to be nervous. I bet yesterday I played nineteen miles o' music. It was worse 'n shooting Kelly pool."

A young girl approached the counter and selected a piece of music. "Will you please have this sung for me?" she requested, handing the song to Bennie.

Mollie clutched the edge of the music counter and held on for dear life, praying that Bennie would answer in the negative; but no such luck.

"Certainly, miss," he returned, quickly. "This young lady here will gladly sing it for you."

"Go to it, kid," he then whispered to Mollie. "It's the piece we practiced yesterday for Johnson. Do your best, because she's McCann's daughter."

Bennie was purposely slow in arranging the music on the piano rack. He was maneuvering to give Mollie time to come down to earth. "Let's go, kid!" he whispered, playing the opening bars. "Knock 'em dead."

After the first few notes Mollie's nervousness disappeared, and her sweet, clear voice reverberated through the crowded aisles. The hum of the big store ceased as if by magic, the people in the aisles edging quietly toward the music counter.

"Let 'em have all you got, kid," purred Bennie, excitedly. "You're making a hit."

When Mollie had finished she was greeted with enthusiastic applause and an encore was demanded, which she rendered willingly.

Bennie, out of the corner of his eye, noticed the head floorwalker conversing with Mr. Johnson and pointing in Mollie's direction. He did not tell her, fearing it might make her nervous, but instead urged her on. She was requested to sing the chorus again, and did so.

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Mr. Johnson, accompanied by the head floorwalker, approached the counter unnoticed.

"Mr. Hudson says not to sing more than two songs in succession," he growled at Mollie, as she finished singing. "It is hurting the business at the other counters."

Mollie, nonplused, left the piano without answering, and nervously arranged some music on the counter.

A Jewish-looking man had been watching her like a hawk. When the counter was clear of people he sidled up to it and stared arrogantly at her. "Say, girlie," he ventured, in a familiar tone, "you've got a pippin of a voice."

"How do you get that way?" retorted Mollie, indignantly. "Cut out the girlie stuff."

Nothing abashed, the man, taking a card from his vest pocket and holding it between his thumb and forefinger, flourished it in front of her. "My name's Rosenberg, and I'm a music publisher."

Mollie unconsciously accepted the card held out to her.

"Did you ever do any plugging on songs?"

"What's plugging?" she interrogated, very much interested, her resentment forgotten.

"Plugging means to push the sale of songs by singing them in cabarets and places," returned Rosenberg. "How much do you get here?"

"Ten dollars a week," replied Mollie, hopefully. "Why?"

"Well, I'll give you twenty-five a week and car fare to plug songs for me. Do you want it?"

Mollie, awed by the munificence of the offer, stared at him, speechless.

"Grab it, kid, grab it!" whispered Bennie, eagerly, pinching her arm. "That guy's the biggest publisher in New York. *He can make you.*"

## McCANN'S DEPARTMENT STORE

Mollie closed her eyes for a second, and a vision of footlights with her bowing from behind them flashed before her. This was her great chance. Bennie again nipped her on the arm and she came to with a start. "Yes, sir," she stammered. "When do you want me to begin?"

"Chuck this job and come to my uptown office this afternoon at three o'clock," replied Rosenberg, pointing to his card, which she still held. "I'll be waiting for you." He turned as if about to leave, but stopped suddenly and asked, "How old are you?"

"Seventeen," glibly lied Mollie.

"What's your name?"

"Mollie Eastman."

Rosenberg made a note on the back of an envelope and, waving his hand in farewell, disappeared down the aisle.

"Put it there, kid," congratulated Bennie, sticking out his hand. "You've sure got the gift of lyin' about your age, but most of 'em chops off a couple o' years instead o' addin' 'em on. But, take it from me, Mabel, you're in soft. If that kike takes an interest in you, it won't be long before you'll be playin' big time."

"Don't think because you can sing that I'm going to let you fool away the company's time," upbraided Mr. Johnson, approaching from the rear and addressing Mollie. "Come on; get busy."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Johnson," she returned, airily, "but I'm leaving at twelve o'clock."

"Leaving?" he ejaculated, staring at her in amazement. "What for?"

"Because I've just been offered a much better position."

"Of all the nerve, this gets me. On the job a couple of hours and then quits. But it's just like chorus girls—don't know a good thing when they see it. All right,



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

get your time. Anyway, I intended to fire you at the end of the week. You talk too much."

"I have saved you the unpleasant duty by resigning," replied Mollie, smiling sweetly. "When I open at the Metropolitan Opera House, I'll send you a couple of box seats, for I certainly do admire a man who has such lovely taste in ties. So long, Bennie. I'll see you again." Then, turning her back on the disgruntled floorwalker, she left for the time clerk's desk.

Bennie was diplomatic and remained silent. He wasn't quitting, and Johnson was still his boss.

At the time clerk's desk the overimportant young man received her card and looked it over. "I knew *you* wouldn't last," he bantered. "What did they fire you for?"

"Twenty-five a week," answered Mollie.

"Cut it out. I'm busy," he retorted as he checked her time. "Come around next Friday and get what's coming to you. Give this slip to the cashier."

"Tell Miss Ryan that I've resigned," ordered Mollie, receiving the extended slip, "and that I'll see her to-night at her house."

"*Me* tell her!" exclaimed the clerk, indignantly. "What do you think I am, an *office* boy? We've got seventeen *Miss Ryans* working here. Good night!"

"Never mind telling Miss Ryan if it is beneath your job," tantalized Mollie. "Instead, will you kindly get me a taxi? Walking is so tiresome for us people who live on the East Side." Winking at him, she pranced out.

Once on the outside, she ran to get a car, scarcely able to wait until she got home to tell the good news. Twenty-five dollars a week! Impossible! She must be dreaming. And a chance to go on the stage! Singing in cabarets—it was too good to be true.

## XIX

### JAKE

MRS. HENDERSON could hardly believe her ears when Mollie told her good tidings. Twenty-five dollars was a fabulous sum in her eyes. She kissed Mollie several times, congratulated her upon her cleverness, and told her that she knew it was in her, and that before many years she would be on the stage, and perhaps would be good enough to play at Weber's.

But suddenly, in the midst of her rejoicing, her face assumed a worried look. Was everything all right? She knew the world. Could Rosenberg be trusted? It seemed strange that a man, just because he had heard a good-looking girl sing a few songs in a department store, should offer such a handsome salary.

Mollie noticed the worried look and inquired the cause. Mrs. Henderson informed her of her fears, but Mollie, instead of being depressed, laughed them away. She could take care of herself; she wasn't a bit afraid. It was the opportunity of a lifetime, and, danger or no danger, she was going through with it. Mrs. Henderson finally came round to her way of thinking, and everything again was joy.

For an hour Mollie busied herself fixing her best dress, while Mrs. Henderson, with a match dipped in ink, painted sundry scuffed spots on her shoes. Mollie screwed up enough courage to ask, in a naïve manner, as if it were the most natural thing in the world:

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

"Mother, now that I am to earn so much money, perhaps it would be better for me to look a little older. Don't you think so?"

"I don't exactly see what you're gettin' at," queried Mrs. Henderson, puzzled. "How are you going to look older than you are?"

"I thought that by putting my hair up, perhaps it would help a little."

Mrs. Henderson burst out laughing. How stupid she had been! Mollie blushed and attempted to speak.

"Wear your hair up! Of course, wear it up. Why not? It will make a wonderful improvement. How silly of me not to think of it before."

Mollie could have hugged her for her words. She ran into the bedroom, and in a few moments returned with her hair arranged artistically.

"Oh-ho! Some one's been practicin'," exclaimed Mrs. Henderson, pointing her finger playfully at her. "Well, believe me, it certainly does become you. You're simply *grand*. Come here this minute and give your mother a kiss. The next thing I know you'll be havin' a fellow. I guess I'd better be gettin' this room ready for Wednesday nights."

She made a pretense of hurriedly getting ready for the great occasion by moving a chair up to the table and dusting the seat carefully. "Come right in, Mr. Vanderbilt," she chuckled, with a mock bow toward the door, "and have a seat. Miss Eastman is in her boudwar, and will be ready in a moment. Is the carriage without?"

Mollie, enjoying the farce immensely, ran into the bedroom. "Mother dear," she called, "kindly ask Mr. Vanderbilt if I shall wear orchids or violets with my lavender dress?"

"Leave it to you, you little minx," replied Mrs. Henderson, laughing heartily. "The person ain't born yet that

## JAKE

can get ahead of you. Come here and give me another kiss. It's all right; Mr. Vanderbilt couldn't wait. He's gone over to court Mary Ryan."

Mollie kissed her mother, and then, getting Mr. Rosenberg's card from her purse, gazed at it earnestly, as if asking it if it were the door to success. Mrs. Henderson, misinterpreting the look, asked her if she didn't think it wiser for the two of them to go to Rosenberg's.

"Listen, mother," answered Mollie. "Sooner or later I'll have to paddle my own canoe, so I had just as well start now. I wasn't worrying about going alone. I was wondering if that card meant that my ambitions were going to be realized. If hard work will get me anywhere, I'll write you from San Francisco."

Mollie kept glancing at the clock. As the minute hand came around slowly to the time when she would have to leave to keep her appointment, she felt nervous, but tried to disguise her feelings from Mrs. Henderson by keeping up a flow of conversation.

The older woman was as nervous as Mollie. Finally the minute hand of the clock, like a pointing finger, indicated two thirty. This would give Mollie half an hour to get to Rosenberg's office.

She rose and kissed her mother good-by. No words were spoken. It reminded one of a soldier wishing God-speed and good luck to a comrade who had volunteered for some hazardous task, which, if successful, would save the regiment. On these occasions silence means more than spoken words.

Before entering the office of Rosenberg, Mollie stood outside and rehearsed what she intended to say to him. She tried several speeches before she selected one which in her mind was the most dignified. Then, with her heart in her mouth, she opened the door.

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

A very frowsy blonde, about seventeen years old, was sitting at a small desk in an outer office, chewing gum furiously. When Mollie entered, she glanced up disinterestedly, then resumed her wrestling with the gum.

"Will you kindly tell Mr. Rosenberg that Miss Mollie Eastman, the singer, wishes to see him?" said Mollie, remembering her carefully rehearsed speech.

"Sit down over there with the rest of the bunch," retorted the blonde, insolently, gazing sarcastically at Mollie. "They're *singers*, too."

"I have an appointment with Mr. Rosenberg," returned Mollie, indignantly. "He has engaged me to introduce his songs in cabaret."

The blonde, taking an end of the gum between her thumb and forefinger, slowly pulled it from her until it reached the snapping point, and then, raising her hand over her head, lowered the thin strip into her open mouth for further mastication.

"An *interdoocer* of songs! Kiss me, Willie. You mean you're a plugger. Well, just *plug* yourself in that seat and wait until Jake's got time to attend to you. Mr. Rosenberg ain't seein' no *interdoocer* of songs to-day, nor next week, neither."

A snicker came from two girls who were waiting. Mollie, red to the roots of her hair, sat down. She gave the other girls a haughty look in payment for their merriment at her expense. The girls were getting ready to return the look with interest when a man about twenty-three entered from the inner office and, looking inquiringly at the three girls, ejaculated, "Eastman!"

Mollie rose in answer to her name, and he gave her a scrutinizing look. "Kind o' young, but I ain't arguin' with the boss. Ever sing in cabarets?"

"In a few," lied Mollie desperately.

## JAKE

"Where?" asked the man.

Mollie was stumped, but, seeing her golden dreams vanishing, she took the bull by the horns. "San Francisco," she volunteered, faintly.

A look of respect replaced the sneers on the faces of the waiting girls.

The man beckoned her to follow him into the other office. "Kid," he advised as the door closed behind them, "you can't lie with that face. But take it from me, you're there a mile. I like your nerve and you get the job. Remember, you've got a friend in this joint from now on, an' his name's Jake."

Mollie was too stunned to reply. Jake went to the door and, sticking his head into the outer office, said to the waiting girls: "No use for you to wait. Miss Eastman of *San Francisco* has got the job."

Closing the door, he turned to Mollie. "You've never seen a cabaret, an' I know it. But I'll tell you what I'm goin' to do. I'm goin' with you to-night and put you hep to the ropes, and, take it from me, *that ain't no mean favor, neither.*"

On the verge of crying, she attempted to thank him, but he waved a protesting hand. "Can the wet stuff. Can it!" he protested, in a tone which he tried to make hard. "We start at Donnelly's at ten o'clock. It's a kind o' tough joint, but there won't be no rough stuff. If any o' them beer hounds gets fresh, give 'em the icy stare."

Mollie smiled nervously.

Jake then went to the piano and called her to his side. "We'll try this one," he suggested, selecting a song. "Now, if you can't sing, stall it, an' see if you can get away with it. Pluggin' don't require no grand-opera voice. It's how you spout it. Plenty o' pep 'll get you by."

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Mollie, following him on the piano, hummed the song through. Jake asked if she was ready. She nodded. Then, with a "Shoot, kid," he ran his fingers over the keys. It was do or die with Mollie, and she knew it.

She sang a few notes.

"Just a minute, kid!" exclaimed Jake, excitedly, stopping playing. "Let's start over. I'll *play* it this time. Ready? . . . Shoot!"

Mollie sang the song through.

"Kid, you're a wonder!" he vouchsafed, sitting back on the stool. "That voice would sell any song. Let's try this one."

Mollie sang two more songs. Jake made no further comment, took her name and address, and told her to be sure and report at the entrance of Donnelly's cabaret at nine forty-five that night. He gave her the address and followed her into the outer office, where he again impressed her to be on the job, *sure*.

"That dame sure made a hit with you, Jake," sneered the blonde. "Why didn't you kiss her good-by?"

"Take it from me, blondy, the kid's a comer. Did you hear her warble? She's a wonder. Rosenberg certainly picked one this time, an' say, do you know I was on the point of givin' her the gate, only she comes that Frisco stuff. When Rosenberg gets in I'm goin' to have him sign her up before the New York Publishin' grabs her."

"Blondy" vouchsafed no answer, but busied herself trying to stretch her gum beyond the stretching point, and failed, but, nothing daunted, she stuck to her task.

## XX

### DONNELLY'S CABARET

MRS. HENDERSON could easily tell by Mollie's face that she had succeeded. They ate scarcely a mouthful of supper, they were so excited over their good fortune. Mary came in after supper and was as enthusiastic about Mollie's success as if it had been hers. After much begging, Mrs. Henderson promised her she could walk as far as the cabaret and wait outside with her until Mollie had finished.

They arrived at the cabaret ten minutes earlier than Jake had asked, but he was there, waiting. He was running no risk of losing Mollie to the "New York Publishin'." He carried a roll of music in one hand and a suitcase in the other. Mollie introduced him to Mrs. Henderson and Mary. He looked at them dubiously.

"We don't expect to *go in*," hurriedly exclaimed Mrs. Henderson, divining his thoughts. "We're just goin' to wait outside until she gets through."

"It ain't accordin' to Hoyle," returned Jake, pensively, "but wait here an' I'll see if I can fix it so's th' two of youse can sit at one o' the back tables an' hear her warble. You don't care if it costs you a couple o' beers, do youse? Beer's fifteen cents in Donnelly's," he added, in an apologetic tone. "Got to pay the rent an' lights, you know."

Mrs. Henderson eagerly assured him that she would buy ten beers, if necessary, to hear Mollie sing.



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Jake nodded and disappeared through the side entrance. He was gone about five minutes, then reappeared with a grin on his face. "The manager says it's all right for this time, but generally he don't allow no family with song pluggers. *It ain't no mean favor, neither*, lettin' you in. *I fixed it up.*"

Mrs. Henderson felt like taking him in her arms and hugging him, she was so pleased. Mollie tried to thank him, but he silenced her with a wave of his hand, and ejaculated:

"Can it! Can it! Where's your costume?" he asked, suddenly. "You don't expect to sing in them street togs, do you?"

Costume? Mollie felt faint. She had never thought of it. Here at the last moment, with success at hand, she was to meet defeat.

"Leave it to me," consoled Jake, after letting her suffer a few seconds. "I sized you up in the office an' knew you didn't know nothin', so, to make sure, I brought along this costume in th' suitcase. A sort o' pink thing. Oughta fit you. Anyhow, it 'll have to do. An' I want to tell you *it ain't no mean favor, neither.*"

A weight was lifted from Mollie's heart and she eagerly thanked him.

This time he did not wave his hand and say: "Can it! Can it!" He was beginning to like Mollie's thanks. "Come on," he admonished, looking at his watch and picking up the suitcase. "It's time to get busy."

Mrs. Henderson, Mollie, and Mary followed in his wake, their hearts in their mouths.

As Jake opened the door to the side entrance a blare of music met their ears. Mollie inhaled deeply, as if breathing mountain air. The strains of the orchestra to her were the elixir of life. She was entering a new world.

## DONNELLY'S CABARET

As she stepped over the threshold a mist passed before her eyes, enveloped in which she saw what at first she imagined was her own face smiling back at her. Then, with a catch of the breath, she murmured, "O God! it's mother!"

"What did you say?" asked Jake, turning around.

"Nothing," answered she, faintly.

The vision disappeared.

Jake introduced Mollie to the manager of the show, who gave her a rapid, appraising glance which made her blush all over. In her heart she resented his look, but smiled in return; there was some one there to protect her. A waiter guided Mrs. Henderson and Mary to a table in a corner, far out of the way.

The place was reeking with tobacco smoke. Through the music snatches of conversation reached them, with an occasional girl's laugh, which sounded strange and unnatural. Now and then a cork popped as a bottle of wine was opened. Mrs. Henderson and Mary were suffering torture. They were so embarrassed they looked straight ahead of them as they followed the waiter through the haze of smoke.

It was not embarrassment caused by the licentiousness around them. It was because they felt out of place, realizing their clothes did not match the surroundings. To them the place was beautiful, the smoke was incense, and the people at the tables were those of another world.

Mollie followed Jake back to the dressing room, then, taking the suitcase from him, timidly opened the door he indicated.

"Ask one of the performers to help you make up," he whispered. "Don't mind their kiddin'. They're a *right* bunch when you get to know 'em."

Mollie stepped through the open door. The room was

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

blue with cigarette smoke. Several girls, half dressed, were lolling before mirrors, rubbing rouge on their cheeks, while others were busy putting on ballet costumes. All of them were smoking.

"Excuse me," stammered Mollie, stepping back nervously. "I guess I'm in the wrong room."

"Come in, kid," invited a chorus girl near the door. "We won't eat you."

At this invitation Mollie closed the door behind her.

"Chorus girl, or principal?" asked the girl who had invited her to enter, a cigarette hanging from her lower lip.

It was all Greek to Mollie, but she desperately took a chance and timidly answered, "No; I'm a song plugger."

"Who for, Rosenberg, or the New York Publishing?"

By this time the rest of the girls, instantly sizing Mollie up as new to the game, crowded around her.

"I'm with Rosenberg," returned Mollie, her nerves on edge, "and this is the first time I was ever in a cabaret."

"You don't have to tell us that," said a tired-looking brunette, "but take a tip from me, kid; make it your first and last."

"Oh, shut up, Maziel!" exclaimed another of the chorus girls. "Why knock cabarets? You're makin' your livin' in one, ain't you?"

"Yes, I am, but it's a damn hard one, I'll tell the world."

"Don't listen to her chatter, kiddo," advised a peroxide blonde, edging through the circle of girls around Mollie and taking her chummily by the arm. "Nobody asked her to work in a cabaret. She went after the job, an' was glad to get it, take it from me. I know I was."

Mollie was bewildered. She didn't know which way to turn. The blonde, sympathizing with her, came to her rescue.

## DONNELLY'S CABARET

"My name's Floss," she informed, confidentially. "What's yours?"

"Mollie Eastman."

"Well, Mollie, come on over to my dressin' table an' make yourself at home. When do you go on?"

"I don't know. I guess Rosenberg's man will let me know. He told me to ask one of the girls to help me make up. Will *you*?" The last in an appealing voice.

"Sure I will," readily answered Floss. "We've got twenty minutes before our first number. Have a smoke?" offering Mollie a cigarette.

"No, thank you. I don't smoke."

One of the girls sitting across from Floss, overhearing Mollie's refusal, turned to her with a glass half filled with whisky. "Well, if you don't smoke," sneered she, "have a drink."

"It's very kind of you," replied Mollie, blushing, "but I don't drink, either."

At her reply the girl turned to the rest and assumed an attitude of mock prayer. "Oh, hell!" she exclaimed, in a half-drunken voice. "We've got an angel amongst us. Let us pray."

An emaciated-looking girl before a mirror secretly crossed herself.

"You just lay off this kid, Mamie," threatened Floss, jumping to her feet and going over to the trouble maker. "From now on I'm lookin' after her, an' if anyone wants to take it up, just start in. *I have spoken.*"

Apparently no one cared to "start in," because at her words there was a dead silence in the room.

"Can't you take a little kiddin', Floss?" whined Mamie, peevishly. "I didn't mean nothin'."

"Well, then, don't try to give her a good time. It won't go when I'm around."

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Mamie drank her whisky and resumed her making up.

Mollie squeezed the hand of Floss in thanks for her help. After sundry aids from Floss, she managed finally to get into the dress Jake had provided. The costume was of pink chiffon and fitted her perfectly, although the skirt barely reached to her knees. The shortness of the dress worried Mollie greatly, but she tried bravely to hide her distress from the others. Floss made her up and, when she was finished, called to the rest of the girls:

"Mamie was right. There sure is an angel with us. Ain't she a dream?"

Floss did not exaggerate. Mollie was a dream, a beautiful dream. She was a little wild flower among weeds in contrast to the other girls. Mamie gave her a searching glance and then turned away with a sneer, but the rest of the girls circled around her and were profuse in their admiration.

"Mollie," exclaimed Floss, in pride, "if you can sing *half* as good as you look, I know a certain principal in this show who'll be looking for another job."

There was a general snicker at this. Apparently one of the principals was not very popular.

A knock sounded on the door and three of the girls shouted at once, "Come in!"

The door opened and Jake entered. Some of the girls were still only half dressed, but they did not seem abashed at Jake's presence.

"Hello, girls!" he greeted, cheerily, casually inspecting them with his glance. "Got the kid fixed up?"

Jake must have been a favorite with them, because they answered in chorus, "Hello, Jake!"

He caught sight of Mollie, who sat down nervously, at the same time trying to draw her abbreviated skirt over her pink-stockinged legs.

## DONNELLY'S CABARET

"Stand up, Kid," smiled Jake, ignoring her modesty, "until I give you the once over."

Mollie rose to her feet timidly.

"A pippin! a pippin!" exclaimed he, approvingly. "Believe *me*, a pippin!"

Mollie, although very much embarrassed at Jake's words, was secretly pleased. Is there a woman born who scorns a compliment about her looks?

Jake led her to a corner and coached her, while the chorus girls continued with their dressing and making up for the opening show.

"You go on before the *revue* starts. I'm only goin' to have you sing one song. We'll try 'Heather Blossoms.' What do you say?"

Mollie was biting her lips from nervousness. If Jake had asked her to walk a tight rope she would have answered in the affirmative. She hardly knew what she was doing. Here was her big chance, and she was so frightened that she would have sacrificed everything willingly just to have been home.

Jake realized her nervousness and tried every trick at his command to make her forget herself. He looked at his watch and rose suddenly. Mollie also rose, and followed him like a condemned murderer follows the prison chaplain to the death chamber.

## XXI

### MOLLIE BOWS TO NEW YORK

IN front of the orchestra was an oval dancing floor where the *revue* was staged. Arriving at the edge of this space, Jake went to the piano player, gave him the song, and returned to Mollie, who, well out of sight of the patrons of the place, was nervously trying to stretch her short skirts to reach her sandal tops. She felt as if she were on stilts.

"When the piano gives the cue," whispered Jake in her ear, "walk out to the center and go to it. First, I'm goin' to make my usual spiel, an' when I'm through, then knock 'em dead. It ain't no mean favor, neither, I'm doin' you; this was my night off."

Mollie was too far gone to answer. She just followed him with her eyes as a roll on the drum requested silence. The patrons at the tables looked up curiously. He made a bow and commenced in a singsong voice:

"Ladies an' gentlemen, as representative of Rosenberg's Publishing House I have the honor to present for your approval their latest song, entitled 'Heather Blossoms.' This song has as yet never before reached the public. Mr. Rosenberg on his recent trip to the Coast at great expense secured Miss Mollie Eastman of San Francisco and brought her East to demonstrate this special song. I thank you one and all," and with an elaborate bow he made his exit.

## MOLLIE BOWS TO NEW YORK

At a table near the edge of the dancing floor, with a girl on each side of him, sat a red-faced, bloated man, with heavy, bluish puffs under his eyes. There was a half-emptied glass of champagne in front of him, which he was twisting idly back and forth by the stem. At the roll of the drum he raised his watery eyes in an inquiring way, but, realizing it was only an announcement, he dropped his gaze disinterestedly to the glass in his hand.

The girl at his right, winking at her companion, put her arm lovingly around his shoulder. "Come out 'of it, Pete," she whispered, "and listen."

He paid no attention to her. At the words "Mollie Eastman," from Jake, the glass dropped from his hand and he stared at the speaker. Both girls eyed him in disgust, attributing the dropping of the glass to drunkenness. The champagne soaked the tablecloth, and a little rivulet ran over the edge and dripped on the girl's dress. With a curse, she removed her arm from his shoulder, shoved her chair back from the table, and sponged her dress with a napkin.

Pete Short, for it was he, gave her no heed, but sat dazed. "Mollie Eastman!" Did he *imagine* he heard that name after so many years? His drunken brain refused to accept the evidence of his ears, and he stared into space.

At Jake's announcement, Mrs. Henderson and Mary, who by this time had become accustomed to the place, and consequently more at ease, were galvanized. At last the big moment had arrived. They leaned forward eagerly, their gaze glued to the dancing floor.

Mollie's legs were bending beneath her. She just couldn't go out there all alone in front of those people with her short skirt. The piano was playing. It was her cue. Without realizing it, she moved forward and was standing, like a speck, in that desert of dancing floor.



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

There was a general hush at her entrance, which was followed quickly by a buzz of conversation. The audience was "sizing her up." Two men sitting at a table on her left inspected her with appraising eyes.

"Oh, baby! Fresh from the farm!" droned one to his companion. "Bill, just take a look at that shape! Me for her!"

"She's certainly a dream, all right, all right!" returned Bill. "But you lay off. I'm going to try and make it." With this remark he stared insolently at Mollie, but she was oblivious to his presence.

Pete Short was gazing at her as if she were a ghost. His eyes had that glazed look which appears in the eyes of a fast-dying fish. His eyesight and memory were battling with his alcohol-seeped brain. So far it was a draw.

Mollie felt faint. She had been standing there a thousand years. Her gaze was fixed on a pillar far back among the tables, which had been decorated to resemble a tree. Away off in the distance she heard the notes of a piano, tinkling like cowbells. Some one was playing a song she once sang in another world, thousands of years ago.

She knew she was out there to do something, but could not remember what it was. As she looked at the pillar, her mother's face smiled down at her from the leaves. With a short gasp, she came to herself. The piano player, grasping the situation, had, without a seeming break, twice repeated the opening bars of her song. In desperation, he started for the third time. But Mollie had come into her own.

She sang the first few notes so low that they scarcely reached the fringe of tables around the dance floor. Jake was shifting from one foot to the other in his chagrin.

## MOLLIE BOWS TO NEW YORK

Mrs. Henderson and Mary were ready to cry. Here and there in the room a low, tittering laugh was heard. At each laugh Mrs. Henderson bit her lip until the blood came.

The chorus girls, in their curiosity to witness a green-horn perform, were crowded in the entrance leading to the dance floor. Every face wore a sympathetic look. Even chorus girls are human and have hearts, not excepting Mamie.

The smiling face in the leaves gave Mollie courage, and her voice regained its strength and clearness. She finished the song. Uproarious applause from the tables was her reward. She bowed prettily and kissed her hand, but the kiss was not for them; it was for that smiling face among the leaves.

The people at the tables pounded glasses and stamped their feet. Jake got hold of Mollie and almost dragged her back to the edge of the dancing floor. She repeated the chorus, but it did not satisfy the audience; they, by their continued applause, demanded that she sing the song again. She did so, and after she had left the dance floor the applause still continued, until the orchestra came to her rescue and played the cue for the opening of the *revue*.

Pete Short's head sank to his chest and remained there. The two girls with him, thinking he had fainted from too much drink, in disgust had two waiters help him out. They called a taxicab and, with the assistance of the waiters, managed to get him into it.

One of the waiters demanded that the girls pay the check. The girl who had had the champagne spilled on her dress felt in Short's pocket, brought out a handful of bills, and gave a fifty to the waiter, telling him to keep the change. She then put the remaining bills into her

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

stocking. The waiter winked at her and she winked back. The taxi driver winked in response to something she said to him, and threw in his clutch.

Jake slapped Mollie on the back in his excitement over her success, and hurried her to the dressing room, but did not enter. To him she was more than a chorus girl.

She sat down in front of the mirror and stared at herself. She couldn't believe it was over and that she had made good. At last it dawned on her. She raised her head in an attitude of prayer and closed her eyes. "God, you've certainly made good with me, and I'm *for* you. Give me my mother, and there's nothing you can't have from me."

A knock at the dressing-room door, and Jake opened it slowly. "Here's your mother and sister," he called, without looking into the room. "They'll give you a hand gettin' your things off. I'll be waitin' outside, so get a move on. I don't wait for many skirts."

Mrs. Henderson and Mary rushed eagerly into the room. Mollie went to her mother, who held her at arm's length for a few seconds, then, with the tears running down her cheeks, suddenly drew her close and kissed her excitedly.

By their help Mollie managed to get into her street clothes. No operatic star ever received more sincere attention than she was getting.

Outside, Jake was waiting impatiently. "It ain't no mean favor, neither, me waitin' for you folks," he exploded, in an exasperated voice, as they approached. "What kept you so long?"

They apologized, and he was soon mollified. Hailing a passing taxi, to the amazement of the three, he invited them to enter. They did so in awe. It was their first

## MOLLIE BOWS TO NEW YORK

ride in an automobile. With a very important air, Jake inquired where they wished to go. Mrs. Henderson was the first to recover from her surprise, and gave the address. Jake told the driver and got in. They all rose to give him a seat, and, as the taxi swerved, Mrs. Henderson sat down in a heap on the floor. The darkness hid her confusion. Jake adjusted matters by helping her to her feet, and, apparently from nowhere, pulled out one of the front seats and sat down. They admired him for his knowledge of the world.

Mrs. Henderson, Mollie, and Mary had nothing to say on their way home—the shock of riding in a taxi had not passed—but Jake made up for their silence.

When the taxi stopped in front of their tenement house, Jake got out first and helped each to alight. Sir Walter Raleigh would have died from envy if he had been living to witness his gallantry.

Mrs. Henderson and Mary said good night, and Mollie was about to leave with them, but Jake whispered in her ear: "Let them go upstairs. I want to speak to you for a second."

He escorted her as far as the vestibule, then held both her hands tightly in his. "Listen, kid," he beseeched, in a broken voice. "I 'ain't done you no mean favor to-night. Don't I get a kiss for it?"

"Certainly," responded Mollie, very much amazed, but putting up her lips to him, "if you want one."

Jake barely touched her lips with his. "Good night, kid," he whispered, squeezing her hands. "You're a dream. Be at the office at three. You know we got to rehearse some songs, because it's *four* cabarets to-morrow night." Waving his hand in farewell, he entered the waiting taxi. She watched it out of sight, then raced upstairs.

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Mrs. Henderson was busy making tea, while Mary was cutting bread and buttering it. "Well, this night was certainly worth livin' for," acclaimed Mrs. Henderson, turning from the stove at Mollie's entrance. "Too bad we didn't drive up in the daytime with that taxi. Nobody 'll believe me when I tell 'em about it to-morrow."

## XXII

### "FIFTY-FIFTY"

**W**HEN Davis reached his apartment he was pretty much all in, and headed immediately for the sideboard, where he poured out a four-finger drink of whisky.

"You're a good friend when it comes to a bracer," he meditated, holding the glass at arm's length, "but I've got to give you the go-by. That last roulette play of mine sure spouted green. If I hadn't been tanked up I'd have never pulled it and I'd be in about eighteen hundred now, instead of being on the wrong side of four thousand. I've been running wild the last few days and I've got to cut it out, that's all."

Despite his words, he drank the whisky without a "chaser," and commenced undressing. The telephone bell rang. He looked at it undecided. Should he answer it? He needed sleep. The bell rang again. He paid no attention to it. The bell kept ringing. Finally, with a curse, he reached for the phone.

"Hello!" he said in an angry, sleepy voice.

"Hello!" replied Judge Schmitt's voice over the wire. "That you, Davis?"

"Yes, this is Davis," replied he, instantly alert. "Is that you, Judge?"

"Listen," continued the judge. "I'm coming down to see you. There's a little matter I want you to fix up for me, and it's got to be done right away. Mulvaney called me up, and I'm glad everything went right. I'll be right down."

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Davis, with a muttered curse, hung up the receiver and went to the sideboard, poured out another stiff drink, and, seemingly forgetting his previous sermon on whisky, gulped it down. After getting into his clothes, he carefully rearranged the bed. It would never do to let the judge see that he was not always on the job.

Davis, by continual striving, had won the reputation among his confederates of being a superman. He invariably swelled with pride when one of them referred to it, flattery being one of the very few weapons which could dent his armor.

He sat down before his desk and spread some papers and a pencil in front of him, to appear busy when the judge entered.

In a few minutes the apartment telephone rang and the hall boy announced the judge. The door to his apartment opened and his caller entered. He took off his things leisurely, looked casually around the room, and then observed the papers in front of Davis.

"I surely would like to have that untiring energy of yours," remarked he, with an inward smile; "up all night and as bright as a dollar. How do you do it?"

"Nothing to it," returned Davis, in an offhand way, but secretly pleased at the success of his strategy. "A couple of hours' sleep is enough for me. I don't believe in wasting time."

The judge, without an invitation, ambled to the sideboard, helped himself to some rye, and returned to a seat opposite Davis, lighted a cigar, and waited.

Davis realized the judge was waiting for him to speak first, but resolved not to. Apparently it was a trivial matter, this business of being the first to speak, but Davis was following a carefully laid out campaign, and every advantage counted, no matter how small.

## "FIFTY-FIFTY"

In days gone by he would not have dared to challenge the judge thus, but things were different now. He was getting the upper hand and his worth and power were being recognized. The judge, over the phone, had intimated that he could do him a favor. Therefore he was going to compel him to show his hand.

The judge sensed that Davis was challenging him, and was uncomfortable. He squirmed in his chair, puffed two or three times at his cigar, looked at Davis, received no encouragement, then shifted his gaze to a picture over the mantelpiece. Davis kept on writing. Finally the judge cleared his throat and spoke. He had surrendered. From then on Davis was the master.

"This Muldoon affair is liable to cause us trouble. I saw Harding, and he's running amuck. He's mixed up with Nannette, the dancer, and I'm afraid she's pumping him."

Davis leaned nearer the judge. This was indeed important news, Harding mixed up with Nannette. If that were so, it meant the judge had had a "falling out" with her. Nannette was a clever dame and might be useful to him. He made a mental note to play up to her. He could use her, but it would be unwise to betray to the judge that he knew much about her. He had better go cautiously. The serious question was, how much did Nannette know? Had she anything on the judge? Well, he would pump him and see.

"I don't see any trouble there," he observed, watching the judge intently from under lowered eyelids. "Nannette's true blue. I've heard it said she's head over heels in love with you. You know rumor says Nannette's a *one-man* girl. It's impossible that she's having anything to do with Harding."

"Impossible hell!" exclaimed the judge, wrathfully.



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Davis's scheme was working to perfection. He had made the judge angry, had put his finger on the sore spot. The thing to do was to cleverly play up this soreness.

"Well, you know best," responded he, nonchalantly tapping his pencil on the desk. "But Harding's a funny guy. I've been in with him for a couple of years and have never had a squeal against him. He's always acted fair with me, but I've heard that when it comes to women the sky's the limit with him. He'd just as soon double-cross his mother if it would help him with a dame."

The judge chewed his cigar savagely. The conversation was getting under his skin. Davis watched him closely. His plan was working beyond his fondest expectations.

"Of course, I don't give a hoot about Nannette personally," replied the judge, after a long pause, "but if Harding tries to pull any of his funny work on me, he'd better look out."

Davis congratulated himself upon his cleverness. "Well, I hope you don't think for an instant that I *thought* you cared anything for her, but it naturally galls a man to know a guy's trying to double-cross him."

"That's what gets me sore," answered the judge, leaning on the desk. "If he would come out in the open, I wouldn't mind, but trying to put it over on me the way he's doing—"

At this point Davis thought it wise to change the subject. If the judge refused to talk on anything else, then it was certain he really cared for Nannette, and the rest would be easy.

"Nannette isn't important enough to worry about," he interrupted. "What's the dope on Muldoon? Anything new?"

"Oh, Muldoon? He'll get railroaded for about five years. I had a talk with Hendricks and he promised, if

## "FIFTY-FIFTY"

elected, to pardon him. Now if Harding keeps up this matter, it's up to us to spike him at his own game. That's where you can help me. Do you know Nannette very well?"

Davis now knew that he had won; the judge *did* care for Nannette. A little additional cleverness on his part, by playing one against the other, and he would soon be the boss of the "gang." A vision of his gambling establishment opening in a few months unrolled before him. There was big money ahead.

"No, I don't *know* her," he returned, feeling his way cautiously, "but I've met her a couple of times, and, believe me, she is some *looker*, and it isn't every man that can land her. That girl's got brains, and if you've won her, Judge, you're to be congratulated."

A pleased smile spread over the judge's face. His two major weaknesses were *bad* women and *good* whisky.

"I wouldn't say that she's crazy about me," he said, in a vain tone, "but she doesn't exactly *hate* me. Tells me everything that goes on."

"Harding's a pretty powerful guy," hesitated Davis, "and has a good reputation and—"

The judge interrupted him by coughing slightly; then, taking a long puff at his cigar, he leaned back and blew smoke rings into the air. "I know he's powerful," he growled, leaning forward, suddenly deciding to take the plunge, "but his standing in the community makes it easy if a person has anything on him. If his family gets wise that he is running around with girls—say Nannette, for instance—he would either have to quit or—"

"Yes; but Nannette would never squeal on anyone," interrupted Davis, quickly, seeing a vantage point to strengthen the judge's confidence in her. "You can go the limit with her, as no doubt you know; otherwise you

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

wouldn't have anything to do with her. You are too wise a man for that."

The judge swallowed Davis's bait, hook, line, and sinker. A great worry was lifted from his mind. He knew Davis was a pretty wise worker and never said a thing unless he was sure of it. He had perhaps been very unwise in his confidences to Nannette, and she could make trouble for *him* if she wanted to, but Davis's remark had put him at his ease.

"Nannette's square, all right," confirmed he, in a buoyant tone. "I was sure of that before I got mixed up with her. Of course we wouldn't use her to get back at Harding. I was counting on *you* using your head in the matter. Has Harding got anything on you?"

"On me?" ejaculated Davis. "I should say *not*, but I've got lots on *him*."

The judge bit his lips with vexation. What was the matter with Davis? Why didn't he make an offer? What was he waiting for? "Listen, Davis," he bribed, after clearing his throat. "You're out to open up a gambling house and I'm the one who can fix the ropes for you; the rest of the gang are nothing to me. Supposing we team up on this deal and, from now on, work together?"

Davis for an instant was afraid to reply lest his voice should betray his eagerness. "It's a strange coincidence, Judge," he replied, finally, in an even voice, "but I was going to see you to-morrow to put the same proposition up to you, because I've been thinking of it for some time. You and I are the brains of the organization, and I don't see where the rest come off to grab a share of the graft."

The judge in silence offered his hand. Davis took it, and a mutual pressure assured each that *he* had won out.

"Now that we understand each other," continued Davis, getting promptly down to business, "the rest is easy. You want Harding to lay off Nannette; I want to open up

## "FIFTY-FIFTY"

a house; so just leave the details to me. It's a bet and I'll come through."

The judge rose, his face jubilant, slapped Davis on the shoulder, and, going to the decanter, helped himself liberally to his favorite drink. "I've got five thousand up at the house which I was going to give the chief on that last deal," he chuckled to Davis as he put on his hat and coat. "He doesn't know it's coming to him, so I'll send you a check for half of it. We're fifty-fifty from now on."

He shook hands and left.

"Davis is a pretty clever fellow," he mused, as the elevator carried him down, "but when it comes to real brains, I guess I win out."

When the door closed behind the judge, Davis smiled a wise smile. "How he ever became a judge gets me. His brains never landed it for him, and all these years I've been afraid of him. The guy was sure right who said, 'The bigger they come, the harder they fall.'"

Talking thus to himself, he went to the telephone and called for a number on Riverside Drive.

"Hello! Is that you, Nan? . . . Well, this is Roulette Jack. The judge was just here and spilled everything. Pretty clever work on your part, Nan. It looks like roulette stock was going up. Listen. I can't talk over the phone, so meet me at the Claridge to-morrow at twelve. I'll be in the lobby, waiting for you. Don't see Harding before you meet me. Good-by, sweetheart."

Thoroughly satisfied with himself, he got in bed to dream of a palatial gambling establishment with Nannette as his partner and Harding as the principal player. As his tired brain journeyed to Morpheus, Davis, with a huge shovel, was filling an immense bin with gold pieces won from Harding, while Judge Schmitt, dressed in the uniform of an attendant, was bowing and scraping in front of him.

## XXIII

### NANNETTE OF THE FIREFLY DANCE

**S**HARPLY at twelve, Nannette of the Firefly Dance entered the lobby of the Claridge and met Davis. They secured a table well back in a corner of the main dining room before speaking of their telephone conversation of the night before.

Davis gave the order and, after the waiter had left, looked around to see that no one was eavesdropping. Assured that the coast was clear, he leaned close to Nannette and gave her arm a loving pat. "Nan," he said, "luck's sure breaking our way."

"Look here, Jack," snapped Nannette, with a becoming pout. "You know I love the ground you walk on, but you've got to play square with me. You're entirely too free with your eyes. Kitty, the maid at the judge's, told me you were trying to make up to her."

Davis opened his eyes in astonishment. What did Nannette know about Kitty?

"Oh, nothing you do gets by me," she retorted, observing his astonishment. "I know all about Kitty. She just dropped the information while I was talking to her, but she doesn't know you and I are sweethearts. It's no wonder you look surprised. Well, I could tell you a whole lot more if I wanted to, but I don't want to."

Davis realized that he had to say something quickly to square himself with Nannette. He did not love her—he

## NANNETTE OF THE FIREFLY DANCE

was incapable of that—but she would do as a pawn to help him in his game of chess. Later on, perhaps, he would throw her over when she ceased being of help to him, but right now he could not afford to lose even a pawn. But since last night she had ceased to be a pawn and had acquired the value of a queen, and what “dub” couldn’t win a game of chess with two queens?

“Now, Nannette,” he cooed, toying with her little finger, “listen to reason. You know I love you and I haven’t any time for other women. As for Kitty, that’s easy. Certainly I made eyes at her, but that’s all, on my word of honor. You see, she works in the judge’s house, and from what I can learn knows what’s going on there. I made eyes at her because I was looking to cop her dope later on. Kitty, or ten like her, haven’t got a chance alongside of you, and you *know* it.”

“I’m sorry, Jack,” consoled Nannette, slyly lifting his hand to her lips, “but you know how sore I get when I think some other dame’s fooling round you. If I thought for a minute Kitty was getting fresh with you, I’d break her neck.”

Davis, just as slyly, kissed his hand where her lips had touched it and resolved that in the future he would be more careful. If Nannette knew about Dora, who sang in Donnelly’s, she would have a fit. He decided that Dora would have to “get the gate.” It was too dangerous, and the risk of losing Nan was not worth it, even though he admitted to himself that he was really fond of Dora and that she was square with him. But Dora could get a lot of fellows in Donnelly’s. For that matter, she could get Donnelly himself, so she would soon get over it.

“Let’s not quarrel, Nan. We’ve got big things in front of us and we’ve got to stick together to put them across.”

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

"You know I'd never really quarrel with you, Jack. I love you too much for that, but I *am* jealous and I admit it."

"All right. Let's get down to cases. What's going on between you and Harding? Let's have all of it."

"There's nothing serious as yet. He met me with that Craven bunch three weeks ago after the show, and we went to Jack's for something to eat. During the evening he got a little sweet with me, and I played him along to see if there was anything in it. I have met him several times since. He's getting to be a regular pest, but I can put up with him because there ought to be real dough in it, and I can play him against the judge. Get the two of them betting on the same horse, and I, or at least *we*"—this with a loving smile at Davis—"can cash in. The judge is simply fit to be tied. The poor old mossback thinks I'm in love with him, and, take it from me, I help him to think it."

"That's all right, but are you getting the dough out of them?"

"Not so fast, Jack. Wait until I've finished. Of course I'm getting the coin. What do you think I've got them hanging around for, my health?"

"Don't get sore, Nan," smiled Davis. "I was only asking. There's no harm in being interested in *you*, is there?"

"Of course there isn't, dear," returned Nannette, lovingly. "I always want you to be interested, but, leave it to me, I'm a pretty good digger."

"You bet you are, dear," flattered Davis, with inward satisfaction, "and you've got more brains than all the dames on Broadway put together, to say nothing about looks."

"This morning the judge called me up and wanted to

## NANNETTE OF THE FIREFLY DANCE

see me," resumed Nannette, drinking in Davis's honeyed compliments, "but I stalled him off on account of my date with you. He told me over the phone that anything you said was O.K. and that he wouldn't be jealous of you. If the old bird only *knew*. He also said he had been lucky in the market and had made twenty-five hundred on a little deal of brains against brains, and that this evening he was going to give me the money and I could do what I wanted with it."

"Well, Nan," vouchsafed Davis, with another squeeze of her hand, "you know what we're saving for, don't you?"

"Certainly I do, and as soon as the old geezer comes across it goes to you, Jack. You know that."

In his mind Davis was adding twenty-five hundred to twenty-five hundred, and reached the logical total of five thousand, but, clever as he was, he could not figure the judge's percentage of winnings in the battle of brains.

"You know every little bit helps, Nan," he volunteered, finishing his mental calculation. "But we've been piking along. From now on we've got to talk *big money*. As long as it lasts, play the two boobs against each other, but make them come across *big*. Then, when the split comes, we can trim them both for a stake that 'll count."

"I wouldn't rush things, Jack. There's lots of time. Harding's promised me a stone that 'll cost ten thousand. He says he'll have it for me Thursday night. In the meantime I'm going to tell the judge about it, and I think he'll buy me something which will make Harding's ring look like thirty cents. Then it's up to Harding to come across and make good."

"That's good stuff, Nanette, but even at that it ain't big enough. What I want is to get something on both of them. Something I can use to *break* them, if necessary."



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

"What is it you want, Jack? Give me the word, and it's yours. You know *me*."

"This is what I want," confided Davis, lowering his voice and glancing around. "Get incriminating letters from them, but don't write any yourself. You haven't, have you?"

"Do you think I'm crazy? They'll never get a comeback on me—that is, not while I have my health and reason."

"That's the girl!" praised Davis. "Use your bean."

"So far, I've eleven letters from the judge which he would hate to have printed in *Town Topics*," informed Nannette. "If a break comes, they ought to be worth at least five thousand each. Harding hasn't arrived at the point where he puts his mush on paper; he's a little too cagy, but he'll fall; they all do in time."

"Get them to talk about their graft. Sympathize with them, love them, do *anything*, but get *inside* stuff."

At his words a black look spread over Nannette's face. Davis instantly realized he had gone a little too far.

"Of course, Nan dear," he continued, adroitly, "don't do anything that isn't true to me. Business is business, but I also am jealous, and I'd go crazy if I thought you *really* made love to those guys. You'll promise me that, won't you? No matter what happens, I always come first?"

"Honey," replied she, gently, her face lighting with love for Davis, "I'm glad to hear you say that. You always did come first with me. What I do or say to those mummies is always outside the line; have no fear on that score."

"I'm mixed up with Harding in his dope graft," returned Davis, after careful consideration as to the advisability of imparting this information to Nannette. "Find

## NANNETTE OF THE FIREFLY DANCE

out who's the real big guy higher up and see if the judge will spill the beans who he's got fixed on the bench in Muldoon's case."

"I'll try; but, speaking of Muldoon," replied Nannette, "there's something I want to tip you off to—that is, if you're mixed up in it. Kitty is a clever little kid, but she's young and doesn't know how to use her information. You know her last name is Williams, and her father is under Captain Mulvaney. Well, he told Kitty all about the fake confession, and said he was only waiting to spill the beans when the time came. Mulvaney thinks he's brainless, so Williams gets away with murder. He's going to put Muldoon wise to the whole frame-up."

Davis's face fell. This was certainly startling information and needed quick action, but he was too wise to confide in Nannette his connection with the case. What she didn't know wouldn't hurt her. One could never tell when a woman would turn against one, and he wasn't gambling on women, not even on Nannette.

"How did Williams get wise?" he asked, casually, yawning slightly.

"It seems Kitty is pretty good at keeping her ear glued to keyholes," returned Nannette, in answer. "She overheard the whole story in the judge's house, and immediately told her father. The old man likes Johnny Muldoon for some reason or other."

"Well, Kitty's got the wrong dope," acclaimed Davis. "She didn't hear enough. The confession is O.K. and it's the only thing that'll save Muldoon from swinging. You advise Kitty to tell her old man not to butt in, because it'll go hard with Johnny if it comes to light. The judge is a friend of Johnny's and is trying to save him. It's the only really decent thing I have ever heard of the judge doing. He went out of his way to help Muldoon,

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

and fools like Kitty and her father are liable to gum the whole affair."

"I'm glad you told me," said Nannette, "because, from what Kitty says, Muldoon is a pretty good fellow when he leaves the dope alone. I'll fix it, all right. Kitty 'll do anything I tell her, and her father worships the ground she walks on."

"Well, you do this for me, Nan, because I'm sort of soft on that guy, Muldoon, myself, and I'd hate to see him swing. Holy smokes!" he ejaculated, looking at his watch. "I didn't know it was so late. Nan, I've got to go. Got an important appointment with a fellow in the 'Street.' You pay the check, because I can't wait. Time certainly flies when I'm with you."

Nannette did not like to see him leave her so abruptly, but she knew better than to interfere when Roulette Jack had "business" on.

## XXIV

### DAVIS, FRIEND AND BENEFACTOR

DAVIS went to a telephone booth and called police headquarters and had it arranged so he could see Muldoon at the Tombs. He then took a taxi to the —th Precinct police station, to have a talk with Williams.

The lieutenant was at the desk when he arrived, Mulvaney having not as yet come down. Ignoring the lieutenant's salutation, Davis called Williams into the captain's private office, closed the door, and indicated a chair for the old man to sit in.

"Look here, Williams," he confided to the turnkey in a friendly voice, "I'm a friend of Muldoon's, and what I say to you is confidential; not even Mulvaney is to know about it. Can I speak frankly?"

The old man nodded his head, greatly mystified.

"You know the confession that was signed in here was a frame-up, don't you?" plunged Davis.

"No, sir," shrilled Williams, in a startled voice. "I don't know any such thing of the kind. I wouldn't sign a frame-up."

"Well, no matter what you think," continued Davis, ignoring Williams's denial, "it was a frame-up, and a pretty crooked one at that. I wouldn't be talking to you, but somehow or other I think you are square and that Muldoon has a friend in you. *I'm Muldoon's friend.* He works for me, and I hate to see the boy swing. The whole idea was mine. *I framed that confession.*"

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Williams looked askance at Davis, his eyes almost popping out of his head.

"It seems funny that I should tell you this," hurried Davis, "but *you're honest* and *I'm honest*, and Muldoon needs a friend. Well, that confession will save Muldoon's life. Without it he'll swing, as sure as there's fish in the ocean. If Mulvaney ever gets wind of this the whole bag of beans is spilled. He hates Muldoon and thinks the confession will croak him. But it won't because everything's fixed so that he'll only get about five years. You tip Muldoon off that I'm his friend and that I fixed the whole thing for him. But if it ever gets out, it will mean me for the pen."

Williams was too surprised to answer. The whole affair had taken such an inexplicable turn that his mind was at sea. He would have to consult Kitty before he could do anything. Davis saw he was getting the result he had worked for. After all, Mulvaney was right when he said Williams had no brains.

"You see how I have put myself in your hands," resumed Davis, striking while the iron was hot. "You can make a lot of trouble for me if you want to, but it means that Muldoon suffers."

"What can I do?" ejaculated the old man, finally.

"Tip off Muldoon that he's got a friend working for him and that that friend is me," counseled Davis. "Advise him to do nothing and say nothing until he gets direct word from me. That boy ain't going to swing if I can help it, Mulvaney or no Mulvaney."

Without giving old Williams time to answer, he slapped him on the back familiarly and left the private office.

Williams was too bewildered to even say good-by; he just stood staring at the closed door. Finally his brain commenced to work—Kitty must be consulted immedi-

## DAVIS, FRIEND AND BENEFACTOR

ately; she had made an awful mistake in reference to Davis.

"Tell Mulvaney that I stopped in to see him," remarked Davis, casually, to the lieutenant at the desk as he passed out, "but couldn't wait. Just had a smoke in his room for a few minutes. Tell him everything is O.K. in that deal I was speaking to him about; he'll understand."

It did not take Davis long to get down to the Tombs, and it took him less time to get an audience with Muldoon.

Johnny was in a terrible plight; cocaine was having its revenge on him. As Davis entered he looked up eagerly. Perhaps this was the messenger he had prayed for, his savior. He gazed appealingly at Davis, as a starved dog begging from his master.

At first glance Davis saw that it would be useless to talk to Muldoon in his present unnerved condition. He knew what Muldoon wanted and he hadn't overlooked this detail, but Muldoon should suffer for the trouble he had caused him. Placing his fingers to his lips for caution, Davis felt in his pockets, while Johnny watched with hungry, beseeching eyes. Why didn't he hurry? Davis took his time purposely; he couldn't even forbear in this instance to show he was master. Johnny, moaning loudly, could restrain himself no longer, and, catching hold of Davis's disengaged hand, kissed it until it was wet, fawning on it as though it were something to be loved.

Davis withdrew his other hand slowly from his pocket. Johnny was trembling with eagerness. Davis opened his hand and displayed a cigar cutter. Johnny shrank back with disappointment and, crouching on the cell floor, whimpered like a child.

Davis laughed at him in contempt. Johnny covered his face with his trembling hands, while his teeth chat-

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

tered so loudly that Davis could hear them. Waiting a few minutes to prolong his enjoyment of Johnny's condition, Davis reached into his pocket and brought out a little folded paper which he tossed to the shrinking form at his feet.

Johnny pounced upon it and nearly tore the paper to shreds in his eagerness to get at the contents. After taking the cocaine he cried like a baby, and, hugging the feet of Davis, in gratitude kissed them repeatedly.

As soon as the cocaine commenced to work, Johnny straightened up and the light of reason again shone in his eyes. Davis turned his head away to give Johnny time to recover himself.

"Johnny," he said, sitting down beside the boy and placing his arm in a friendly way about his shoulders, "I'm your friend, and old Williams is your friend. But don't trust anybody else. You do everything Williams tells you, and we'll get you out of this mess. But if you don't follow instructions you're going to swing sure."

Muldoon shuddered.

"I know what it means when the dope gives out," Davis continued. "And you know what the inside of hell feels like, don't you?"

Johnny nodded, with another shudder.

"All right, then. Just remember that I'm your friend, and that I'm the only one who can get the stuff in to you; and I won't forget it—that is, if you do as you are told. If you don't—well, it's no dope, and you know what that means."

Again Johnny kissed Davis's hands and promised to obey him to the letter. Davis withdrew his hands from Johnny's grip and left the cell. As he passed down the corridor one of the keepers said to another:

"That duck sure gets what he wants. I'd like to have

## DAVIS, FRIEND AND BENEFACTOR

his drag. When he comes around, regulations go out of the window."

The next day old Williams, after a consultation with Kitty, decided that the only true friend Muldoon had, outside of themselves, was Davis.

Through the aid and wire pulling of Davis, Williams managed to get an audience with Muldoon, in which it was decided that Johnny really did confess, and that, if it hadn't been for Davis, Johnny would now be headed for the death house at Sing Sing. Johnny was duly grateful, and resolved that when he got out he would square the debt he owed Davis, and that in the meantime a word from him would be law.

Davis took pains to see that Johnny was supplied with just enough cocaine to tide him over, except for a break here and there. It would never do for him not to have his occasional periods of hell. It was the only sure hold Davis had on him. He couldn't rely on plain gratitude; it was too risky.

Johnny's trial was rushed, and he received a sentence of seven years. Hendricks was not elected, so it looked as if Johnny would have to do his full term, minus certain time for good behavior. But he didn't care; Davis was his friend, and he knew that through the underground channel his supply of dope would always reach him. It was great to have a friend like Davis on the outside, looking after one.

The day the doors of Sing Sing closed behind Johnny, Davis, Judge Schmitt, and Captain Mulvaney breathed a sigh of relief. They had done their duty.



## XXV

### SING SING

**F**IVE years have rolled by since the gates of Sing Sing prison clanked behind Johnny Muldoon. Davis had kept his word and had sent him cocaine at irregular intervals through channels known only to criminals and certain of the police. The years of confinement, aided materially by the ravages of the drug, had left their imprint on Johnny. He was a shell of his former self; his skin was dried and stretched tightly over his bones, while his face was drawn and shrunken and had that deathlike pallor peculiar to prisons. Close association with crooks had removed whatever manhood there had been in him. The world owed him a living, and when he got on the outside he was going to collect his debt from humanity.

Through the efforts of Davis, after two years' imprisonment, Johnny had been appointed a "trusty." Many chances to escape had presented themselves, but he was too cunning to take the risk. He could wait. Furthermore, he was on the "inside" of the inside, and there was big money to be made as a "go-between." Davis had realized that Muldoon would be of value to him as a "trusty," and he had had him appointed, because there were certain prisoners in Sing Sing with whom it paid to keep in touch. Even though behind stone walls, their information was of great use. It kept him in closer touch with the underworld element, which was so handy to use at times.

## SING SING

If some one got troublesome and interfered with his carefully laid plans, by the help of the criminal element it was more or less a simple matter to "frame him up" or, if necessary, to have him "croaked."

Through Muldoon, secrets were passed to Davis from the inside which put many a respectable, law-abiding citizen in his power. And having something "on" a man meant money and "pull" for Davis. The underworld, when they got "in bad," and every other means failed, looked to Davis as their last hope. But he never did a favor for any of them; his price was high and they had to pay it. Through his efforts many a crook was walking the streets a free man, but he had paid dearly for his liberty.

Johnny Muldoon's brain had not been idle during his imprisonment; every piece of information, no matter how small, he had passed out to Davis or had received from him, was noted carefully in a little book which he always carried with him. During many restless nights, when locked in his cell, he had devised a code. It had taken him nearly a year to master it, but time was of no value to him, and he also was taking no chances; he trusted no one, not even his good friend Davis.

If his book should fall into other hands, no one would be the wiser as to what it contained. Page after page of unintelligible marks would mean nothing to them, but to Johnny the scribbled hieroglyphics were as clear as typewritten words. Every notation represented an asset to be cashed in when the proper time came.

Through good behavior, Johnny's time had been commuted to five years and a few days. Twice Davis, through his "pull," could have had him released, but he had selfishly refrained from helping him, because Muldoon meant more to him in prison than if he had been free.

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Johnny had also acquired a mania for gambling. Association with some of the cleverest gamblers of the United States, who were doing long terms for different crimes, had taught him every trick of the game. There was nothing he could not do with dice or cards, and he had learned the inside workings of every "brace" game known to crooked gamblers.

At first it was difficult to hold conversation with other prisoners, without the guards overhearing, but that was before society women had interested themselves in the "poor, misguided convicts," and had established mutual-welfare leagues.

The "honor" system was inaugurated, and then it was easy for all concerned. Many a robbery was planned while the men were placed on their "honor." Several of the first offenders were helped morally by the "honor system," and took advantage of it to prepare themselves for the time when they would again be free, but the majority of the inmates "prepared" themselves in a different way.

Johnny had been quick to sense the value of these well-meaning women, and immediately took advantage of the chance they offered. Many a woman drove to Sing Sing in her limousine, carrying a "harmless" letter from a convict's wife, which she, in her pity, slipped quietly to the one it was intended for, not knowing it contained enough cocaine to last him a week. It added new zest to their jaded lives to converse with a real live murderer.

It was a dreadful shame that such a fine-looking burglar should be kept in prison, when the crime he had committed was not really his fault, and even if it were intentional on his part, still, he had repented and had promised to lead an honest life when he was free. How did they know he would keep his promise? Why, because he had told them he would, and deep in their hearts they knew

## SING SING

that a man with such honest eyes could not lie, much less *think* of crime.

To them Johnny was a shining example, though they could not understand why he had wasted away so quickly, but no doubt it was because of worry over killing a man. Anyway, the man should have been killed, because Johnny had said so. Johnny was only defending the honor of his sweetheart. *He* was not a convict; he was a *hero*, a chivalrous knight who had taken up his lance in defense of a woman's honor. The laws were all wrong; there should be no prisons. When Johnny was released, they would show the world that he was their equal and could be trusted. *They* were going to trust him. And all the time their noble minds were working thus, Johnny was thinking what a "cinch" it would be to rob their houses.

In one instance a confiding old lady had described minutely her palatial home and had told him how she had placed her trust in the goodness of mankind by removing her valuables from a safe-deposit vault and transferring them to her home.

Johnny's notebook in this instance had served him in good stead. He had made a careful notation of every detail of the house as described by her, and two or three days later he had intrusted her with a letter to his "poor, broken-hearted sweetheart." She was glad to deliver it for such a noble and persecuted man.

The letter contained full particulars and plans to a gang of "yeggs" to rob her. They promptly accomplished this, and the confiding old lady, days later, wept real tears to Johnny and told him that her "trust in mankind" had been grossly abused.

Johnny sympathized with her, and instructed his "sweetheart," by another letter, which she delivered, to put his share of the "swag" in a bank under the name of

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

**Morgan.** This particular lady's visits to Sing Sing, and her interest in the "honor system," ceased suddenly, but she wrote to Johnny occasionally and promised him a "position of trust" when he regained his freedom. Johnny, having a sense of humor, smiled as he made another notation in his book.

In three days more he would be free. Davis, knowing of Johnny's cleverness in "brace" games, had offered him a position as croupier in his gambling establishment, and Johnny had accepted. Davis figured that a dress suit would accomplish wonders in Johnny's appearance.

## XXVI

### LOOKING BACKWARD

**T**HE five years had indeed been kind to Davis. One by one he overcame the obstacles in his path, until now he had reached the pinnacle of his ambitions. The palatial gambling establishment was a reality. Harding had obligingly died just at the right time, and had been buried with great pomp and respect in the most exclusive cemetery. The papers gave him two-column heads on the front page, eulogizing his unimpeachable career and the many kind deeds he had done for his fellow men.

The judge attended his funeral and had been interviewed as to the noble deeds of the deceased.

Nannette had played with consummate cleverness, and it was not her fault that Harding had got wise to her game; it was just plain hard luck, but she had inveigled nearly eighty thousand dollars out of him before this happened. Then good old pneumonia had stepped in just at the time when Harding was going to make trouble for all concerned.

Leading a double life had sapped the judge's cunning and energy until now he was putty in the hands of Nannette and Davis. They looked on him with contempt. Davis had him in his power completely, and was not adverse to making him jump when he jerked the string, but the judge was still useful, so he retained him.

Davis, by clever deceit and many lucky hairbreadth

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

escapes, had retained the affection of Nannette. Intimate association with her had palled on him, but she was still clever and therefore was useful, so he played the game with her, but only waited for a favorable opportunity to "ditch" her.

He had been wise. She had nothing on him she could prove, and it would be an easy matter to "frame" her when the time came, so he was not worrying. Dora of Donnelly's had committed suicide years ago, but he had reasoned it was not his fault because she loved him, so he brushed that detail from his mind and his conscience was clear.

Mulvaney was now Inspector Mulvaney, with his office at headquarters. He also was an unwilling servant of Davis, and Roulette Jack availed himself of every opportunity to rub it in. Mulvaney was sinking deeper and deeper into the mire, and as he sank his hatred for Davis grew. If he could only have him croaked. He had tried several times to put the deal through, but his nerve had failed him at the last moment, so he still bowed and scraped to his master. It was bandied about the Force that he was using cocaine, but no one had actually seen him; still the rumor grew.

Old Williams had been called to the Great Beyond, but, before leaving, a dying talk with his daughter Kitty had convinced her that the straight and narrow way was the better and easier.

For a short time after her father's death she persisted in living up to her former ideas, but she soon found that playing the game with her old associates brought her invariably the loser's end. She lacked just that something which prevented her from being successful. It was her kind heart which stood in the way, but, not divining the real cause, she put it down to stupidity, and chose

## LOOKING BACKWARD

the narrow path. She had made a short visit to her father's home in Eagle Nest, away off in the hills, and at first the country appealed to her, but the call of New York soon brought her back to its bright lights, and she hired out as a helper to a Fifth Avenue modiste.

Excesses and drink, coupled with the shock of seeing Mollie in Donnelly's cabaret, had pulled Pete Short into the gutter. His theatrical agency had passed into other and better hands. The Bowery had claimed him with the rest of its derelicts. Champagne had changed to three-cent schooners of beer and five-cent whisky, and expensive suppers had given way to free lunches.

In the summertime a bench in the Park was his bed, but in the winter, when lucky, a fifteen-cent cot in a filthy lodging house was his lot. He had tried joining the Salvation Army, but had been caught stealing nickels from the drumhead, so his stay with them was short; but it had been easy while it lasted.

Occasionally, when by hook or crook he possessed a dollar or two, he wandered back to his old haunts on Broadway and stood at the entrances of the places where he had once been a favored guest, and with varying emotions closely scanned the faces of the people as they passed him, always on the alert for a familiar face that would be good for a "touch."

For a time he was fairly successful, but he played it out, and they soon got tired of giving alms and forgot the days when they used to be his guests at champagne suppers. Finally, with a curse, he accepted the inevitable, and shuffled back to the pathway of human wrecks and found a waiting niche.

Tom Mills, still clinging to booze, had ceased playing "big time." His voice was hoarse and cracked and his legs refused to obey the commands of his brain. He had



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

connected, as stage manager, with a cheap burlesque show, and was just about "getting away with it." Grease paint had faithfully done its best, but the days of miracles are past, and Time had finally come into his own. Even so, there still were some chorus girls who helped him spend his small weekly salary. Mills had passed the stage of "picking them"; he was satisfied to take what was left. Necessity greatly changes man's views.

Mary Ryan had kept her nose to the grindstone until one Sunday, at the Ninth Ward Democratic Club's annual outing, she had met a widower, an undertaker by trade. The acquaintance ripened into friendship, and then into love. He proposed to her several times and was finally accepted. She confided to Mollie the real reason why she had said "yes." One day he had showed her his wife's grave, and had pointed with great pride to a magnificent tombstone at its head, and had intimated that when she died he would give her one that had it "skinned a mile." Perhaps this had appealed to Mary's Irish humor, because she was now established comfortably in a flat over his undertaking establishment on Third Avenue and was known as Mrs. Newman.

## XXVII

ENTER DONNELLY

**M**OLLIE'S battle with time had not been easy. The first three months of her engagement with Rosenberg as a song "plugger" had been rosy hued, and everywhere she sang she had met with instant success. Jake had arranged it so he could accompany her to the different cabarets, and had appointed himself her protector, to "shove off the beer hounds," as he termed it, and did not forget to add, "It ain't no mean favor, neither." During these three months Jake was very attentive to Mollie, and kept reminding her at every opportunity: "Kid, you 'ain't got a thing to worry about in your future. I'm just lookin' you over, an' if you comes up to inspection, in a couple o' years I'm goin' to marry you, because the two of us ought to be able to get the geldt."

Mollie was amused by Jake, and did not pay much attention to his love making, but, in spite of his domineering attitude toward her future, she liked him sincerely.

Jake had mapped out carefully a two years' campaign for himself and Mollie, but fate, in the guise of Mr. Rosenberg, stepped in and knocked his plans into a cocked hat. He was transferred to the Cincinnati branch of the publishing house, and Joe Levy was assigned to play the piano for Mollie in her song plugging. Before Jake left, he took Mollie aside and advised her "to keep her eye skinned on Joe, because he wasn't exactly an angel, but not to get him sore, because he could make it hard for her, as he had a great pull with Rosenberg."

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Joe Levy paid attention to Mollie, but it was a different kind from that of Jake. She took an instant dislike to him. At first she tried to be pleasant, but Levy got so "fresh" that one evening, when he attempted to kiss her, she lost her temper and slapped his face.

Levy didn't say anything at the time, but he determined to get even with her. For about two weeks he was very nice to her, but his actions did not fool Mollie. She was taking Jake's advice and was keeping her "eye skinned on him."

She did not confide her troubles to Mrs. Henderson, because she knew it would worry her, and she was afraid she would go to Rosenberg's and lay the law down to Levy, and then, perhaps, she would lose her job.

Another obstacle appeared in her path. Donnelly, the proprietor of the cabaret, was attracted to Mollie and went out of his way to press his attentions. Of the two evils, she preferred Levy. As soon as Donnelly became interested, Levy realized there was no chance for him, so he surrendered and joined forces with him.

Levy, coached by Donnelly, tried his best to get Mollie to accept the cabaret owner's attentions, painting a glorious future for her.

To use his own words: "For God's sake, kid, don't be a simp. I tell you there's no limit to him when he starts spendin'. Pack up that high-brow stuff an' get wise."

Mollie stood it as long as she could, but finally it became unbearable. Floss, the chorus girl, sized up the situation, and one night walked home with Mollie and had a heart-to-heart talk with her.

"Mollie, take a tip from one who has been through the mill. Don't fall for the bull Donnelly and Levy are shoot-in' into you. There ain't nothin' to it. Donnelly's got a rep that would make hell freeze up in comparison.

## ENTER DONNELLY

He's just tryin' to make you the same as he's made nearly every chicken that's worked in his place. For a few months he'll give you everything you want, and then he gets tired of you, and what happens? You're on the bum, and it's only a short time before you fall for some one else. You just listen to Floss, and tell them both to go where ice is at a premium, even if it costs you your job. There's lots of jobs in this world. Perhaps it 'll be hard at first not to be workin', but you won't starve, and some day when you meet a decent fellow that wants to *marry* you you'll be mighty glad that you gave Donnelly the go-by."

This talk of Floss's had a great effect on Mollie, and she decided to follow her advice. Accordingly, the next night, when Levy and Donnelly went a little too far, she gave them "a piece of her mind." Nothing happened for a couple of days and Mollie's hopes rose; she thought they had seen how futile their efforts were and had given up.

But on the following Saturday she was called into Rosenberg's private office and was told that if she didn't give up her foolish ideas and listen to reason, she could look elsewhere for work.

Mollie replied indignantly that she intended to act as she saw fit, and that she guessed the New York Publishing Company would be glad to get her. She left Rosenberg's office in a rage. As the door slammed behind her, Rosenberg reached for the phone and had a long conversation with the manager of the New York Publishing Company. It was not generally known that Rosenberg had gained control of both companies.

When Mollie applied for work at the New York Publishing Company she was shown immediately into the office of the general manager. She would show Rosenberg that her talents were in great demand, and determined to ask for a salary of thirty-five dollars a week.

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

The general manager received her very cordially, and in her innocence she told him everything. When she had finished, he sat back in his swinging chair, puffing on a big black cigar. "Such a fool I have never met," he wailed. "Rosenberg's a friend of mine and has got it a fine business, and you should tell him how to run it. Donnelly's a big man and a good man, and a girl should be so foolish as not to like him. Now run back and tell Mr. Rosenberg you were only fooling, like a nice girl."

The tears poured from Mollie's eyes. In silence she rose, went to the door, opened it, and then turned back as if to say something, but no words would come. She closed the door and left. She was heartbroken. So this was the end of her glorious dreams. In New York talent was a secondary consideration. Success had to be bought. Well, she would never buy it, not even if she had to resort to the washtub for a living.

She decided not to tell Mrs. Henderson; at night she would pretend to go to work and in the afternoon would make a round of the agencies, and it would only be a short time before she got another position.

For a week she followed her carefully planned schedule, but the only encouragement she received were promises to notify her if anything turned up.

At the end of the week she was desperate. It was pay day and she had no money. What could she tell Mrs. Henderson? Why had she acted a lie? It would have been much easier to confide in her mother from the start. She made up her mind to tell her everything, and climbed the stairs slowly.

Mrs. Henderson had a nice supper waiting for her, but Mollie had no appetite. Twice she attempted to tell of her misfortune, but each time she decided that after supper would do. After supper it was just as hard, but

## ENTER DONNELLY

before she had mustered courage to tell, Mrs. Henderson took her in her arms and fondled her.

"You don't have to tell me, Mollie," consoled she. "I know all about it. I figured out there was something wrong about a week ago. Jake wrote to me from Cincinnati shortly after he left and told me to look out for you, and I was expecting something to happen. He told me all about Levy."

Mollie commenced to cry.

"Now don't you cry, dear. There ain't nothing to worry about. We can get along. I've still got a few dollars in the bank, and this old back is as strong as ever."

Mollie could listen no longer. Choking with sobs, she ran to her room and threw herself on the bed. When she had somewhat quieted down she got her mother's picture from the bureau and talked to it as if it were her living mother.

"Mother dear, I don't know what has happened to you and perhaps you are dead, but I think I have done right. It isn't fair to Mrs. Henderson for me to be out of work, and I do want to make a success so much. Shall I go back to Rosenberg's, mother dear?"

Once again her mother's face seemed to peer at her from out of the past, but this time it was sad, and Mollie imagined she shook her head slowly. "God," she prayed, in desperation, kneeling on the floor, "I don't like to be bothering you all the time, but I need help, so if you want to help a little, I'll be awfully obliged to you."

She then rose from her knees, kissed the photo good night, and went to bed and dreamed that Levy and Donnelly, seated in a beautiful sleigh filled with furs, were inviting her to get in, and pointed to the horizon where beautiful northern lights were flashing. Mollie looked behind her and shuddered. An unending lane of washtubs

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

was opening up, and tired-faced women pointed to the sleigh and waved their hands for her to enter it. She climbed in and Donnelly picked up the reins and they were off. The road in front of them faded into rows of footlights, and the bushes on the roadside changed into millions of applauding hands, but constantly in front of her was her mother's face. The eyes were turned from her and she could see tears stealing down the cheeks.

## XXVIII

### THE REAPER

**F**OR weeks Mollie haunted the agencies. One day she would return in despair, but the next she would be buoyant with hope, because of some promise received. This hopefulness would last for about a week and would die slowly as nothing more was heard. Then came the climax of her troubles.

While hanging clothes on the roof, Mrs. Henderson caught a violent cold, which developed into pneumonia. For three weeks she hovered between life and death. Mollie was almost a wreck from constant nursing. During the day Mary Ryan, now Mrs. Newman, came in and watched until supper time, while Mollie was making her tour of the booking agencies.

Meeting with nothing but promises, Mollie finally gave up in despair, and one afternoon she wended her way toward Rosenberg's office. She had decided to accept the easier way. Rosenberg was not in, and she promised to call the next day. That night Mrs. Newman listened to Mollie's decision and upbraided her sharply for it. It nearly broke her heart to do it, but she reasoned it was the only way to bring Mollie to her senses.

After a hard night of nursing, Mollie started out the next morning, looking for other work, and got a position through the efforts of Bennie Cohen in a small retail music store downtown. The salary was only eight dollars a week, but it was a godsend to her.



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Despite her new position, medicine and doctors' bills soon made serious inroads in the bank account, and Mollie was at her wit's end to meet expenses.

The crisis of Mrs. Henderson's illness passed, but it left its mark on her lungs. The doctor informed Mollie that rapid consumption would develop and that Mrs. Henderson was not long for this earth. It was only a matter of time, and the treatment she received would decide how long she would last.

Mollie kept this from Mrs. Henderson, and waited upon her as if she were a child. As a result of her illness Mrs. Henderson had lost her fighting spirit, and turned helplessly to Mollie for everything she wanted. The doctor, in his cruel, unthinking way, advised a change of climate, and said if Mollie wanted to prolong her mother's life, she must somehow arrange to send her to the mountains.

Mollie was in despair, but through the efforts of Mary she got in touch with a cheap boarding house in the Catskills, and, drawing some money from the bank, coaxed Mrs. Henderson to go with her for a couple of weeks.

The older woman had recognized the handwriting on the wall and did not want to touch a cent of the money in the bank. She was afraid she would be buried by the city. Many a lonely cry Mollie had in her room after one of these talks with her mother, but in time she persuaded her to go.

When they reached the place they discovered that alluring circulars exploiting the mountains did not always tell the truth. After a week's stay Mrs. Henderson demanded she be taken back to her home in the city. Mollie, very much disappointed in the place, was glad to accede to her request.

Upon her return she found that another girl had been given her place in the music store, even though the pro-

## THE REAPER

prietor had promised to hold the position for her. She was gradually losing her faith in human nature.

Luckily, she got a position in a department store and, by the help of Mrs. Newman, contrived to make both ends meet. But the bank account dwindled slowly but surely.

For a while Mrs. Henderson picked up rapidly and the future again looked bright. In addition to this Mollie received a letter from one of the agencies which threw her into ecstasies of delight. She was to have a chance at a small singing part in a musical comedy, and was to report for rehearsals the following Monday.

All day Sunday she dreamed of a glorious career and put her troubles behind her. This opportunity was to be the real beginning of her success.

But she received an awful shock when the agent informed her "that of course she wouldn't be paid for rehearsing. It would only take about five or six weeks, and then the show would go on the road for a two weeks' tryout, and if it made good would come into New York for a long run."

Mollie, by strict economy and many sacrifices, scraped through the five weeks' rehearsals, and was overjoyed at the thought of starting out the following Saturday. They were to open in Paterson, New Jersey. On Thursday Mrs. Henderson had a relapse and Mollie had to cancel her engagement. She was learning fast that show work was not a bed of roses.

After several more failures to get work from the agencies, she relinquished her ambition to go on the stage and settled down to work in one of the department stores.

Time passed, and Mrs. Henderson clung to life by a thread which at any moment threatened to snap.

Then the time came when Mollie sat at the bedside of her mother, waiting the grim call of the Reaper. The doc-

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

tor had said Mrs. Henderson would not last the night. She was breathing heavily and her eyelids were closed. "God," prayed Mollie, gazing lovingly down at the wasted face, "you haven't come through very much for me of late, and I guess it's my fault, but I know my mother here is good, even if she has doubted you. Can't you let her stay with me a little longer? I'm all alone and I need her."

A knock sounded at the door and the doctor entered. He found Mollie in tears and tried his best to cheer her up, but, after feeling Mrs. Henderson's pulse, he shook his head solemnly. There was no hope.

Mrs. Henderson opened her eyes, saw the doctor, and tried to smile, but failed. Her lips moved, and Mollie bent over to catch what she was saying. The words came in broken whispers.

"Tell—tell—him to go into—into—the kitchen. I want to talk to—you—Mollie. I've had a wonderful vision—and I'm goin'—fast."

The doctor, with tears in his eyes, rose and left them alone. Mollie was trying desperately to force back the lump in her throat which threatened to choke her.

Mrs. Henderson coughed weakly and then seemed to be battling with death. Several times she tried to speak, but failed. Finally words came from her mouth with a rustling sound, as if dead leaves were scurrying before autumn winds.

"I saw her—Mollie—your mother. She's dead—an' she's waitin' for me. I'm goin' to meet her. Tell me, dear—I've been good to you—'ain't I? I've always—done my best—'ain't I—Mollie? Kiss me, dear—I'm goin'—I'm—" and her voice died out.

Mollie leaned over and kissed her on the forehead. Again her lips moved, but her voice was growing fainter.

## THE REAPER

"Your mother—is callin'—me. Mollie—Mollie—don't let—the city—bury—me. Promise—promise me—" and the soul of the dying woman started on its journey to the Great Beyond where another Mollie was waiting to welcome her.

Mollie gazed into the face of the dead woman. A beautiful radiance hovered for a second over the sleeping form. No doubt her mother had come to guide the soul on its way.

Clenching her hands, she raised her head to heaven, and spoke, the words falling slowly but determinedly from her lips:

*"God—I'm—off—you—for—life."*

Then she collapsed on the floor and sobbed hysterically. The doctor entered the room and carried her tenderly to the sofa in the kitchen. He then went out and telephoned to Mrs. Newman, who soon arrived.

As Mary entered, Mollie, with dark rings under her beautiful eyes, and a drawn look on her face, greeted her: "Mary, she's dead, and I've got to make good. There's hardly thirty dollars left in the bank. Will you ask your husband to bury mother the way she wanted to be buried? I have no money, but I'll pay it back with good interest. And I can do it, too."

"Now, don't you worry, dear," consoled Mary, hugging Mollie to her breast. "Mrs. Henderson will have a swell funeral, and you can take your time about payin' it back. I don't give a rap whether it's paid or not. She was a mother to me, too."

## XXIX

### ON HER OWN

THE afternoon that Mrs. Henderson was laid to rest on the *West Side* Mollie returned to her home, but there was an emptiness there which never could be filled—some one had left and had closed the door behind them.

Mary invited Mollie to room with her and she accepted gladly. The next day she packed her things and, before leaving, stood on the threshold and said good-by to the now empty rooms, the only home she had ever known. On the stairs an Italian family was waiting impatiently to take possession. A rat scampered across the hall; it knew that before long there would be a pile of filth it could call home.

At Mary's house it took Mollie several days to regain her perspective. She had made up her mind she was going to succeed, but somehow her success did not appear to her as it had before; perhaps it was because her best friend had gone and there would be no one to applaud her. The course to pursue was plain. If Donnelly would take her back, she would go. It was to be a fight of wits; she would play him along as far as possible, and then quit; but during the game she would keep her eyes open for something else. What she needed was experience and she was going to get it. Then a doubt entered her heart. Supposing, after all these years, Donnelly had forgotten

## ON HER OWN

her, or perhaps time had changed his desires and he would not be interested.

The next day she dressed in her best and reported at Rosenberg's. A new girl was at the desk. She asked for Joe Levy, but was informed that Levy hadn't been with them for months, but if she wanted to see Jake, instead, he was in the inner office. Jake! This was indeed welcome news.

Trembling with suppressed excitement, she entered the office. Jake looked at her in amazement, then jumped from his chair and ran to meet her.

"Mollie!" exclaimed he. "Well, can you beat it? And where did you come from? Gee! I'm glad to see you! Sit down."

Mollie returned Jake's greetings as earnestly as they were offered. Jake's eyes filled with tears when he learned of Mrs. Henderson's death. After many questions as to what had happened in the years which had passed, Mollie told her errand.

Jake said that Rosenberg had turned the management of the concern over to him, to assume officially the presidency of the New York Publishing Company. "How's the voice?" he asked, leading her to the piano. "As good as it used to be?"

Mollie was laughing excitedly; her troubles were forgotten for the time being. Out of the corner of his eye Jake sized her up. She sure was a "pippin."

"Listen, kid," said he, "and this ain't no mean favor, neither, that I'm going to do. Your voice is too good for song pluggin', so I'm goin' to get you a tryout in a cabaret as a principal, and after you're there and get hep to the ropes, I'm goin' to land you in the Palais Jardin on Broadway—on *Broadway*—get me?—on *Broadway*!"

"And, Jake, I can *dance*, too," volunteered Mollie,

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

shyly, flushing with pleasure at Jake's words. "I practiced at home, before mother died."

"Great! I'll sure push you to the limit." His face fell suddenly. Mollie noticed his change of expression and inquired the reason.

"I was just—thinkin' what Rachel would say if she got a glimpse at you. You know Rachel's jealous as the devil."

"Who's Rachel?"

"That's right," returned Jake, by this time quite embarrassed, "you didn't know it, did you? but I'm spliced—married. Rachel's the cook."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mollie, in great relief.

"Listen, Mollie," apologized he, mistaking her exclamation for one of disappointment. "I know I didn't treat you right, but I was lonely—and Rachel's father's got a good business—"

"Oh, I'm so glad, Jake. Let me congratulate you on your good fortune."

Jake was nonplused. He had expected a scene, expected that he would have to wipe her tears away and console her. Her answer was a blow to his vanity, but, after swallowing hard, he recovered quickly.

"If you will kindly step into *my* office," he said, trying hard to be dignified, as he rose from the piano and walked into the next room, "we'll go into the matter of the cabaret."

Mollie, with a smile, followed him into the office. She was thoroughly enjoying herself for the first time in a long while. Jake certainly was a dear.

Jake reached for his desk phone and called a number. "Hello, Max! This is Jake. I've got a pippin in the office." He winked at Mollie. "Have seen her work, and she's great—got a voice like a nightingale. There with the shape, too." Mollie blushed. "I want you to

## ON HER OWN

try her out for your new *revue*. Better let her sing our two songs. . . . No, I ain't tryin' to plug my songs. This is on the square; she's a find. . . . All right, I'll send her right over.

"Max is an agent," he explained, hanging up the receiver and looking at Mollie, "and he's putting on a new *revue* that opens at Donnelly's next week."

Mollie bit her lips. So, after all, it was to be a fight between Donnelly and her. Well, if it had to be, it had to be; she wasn't afraid.

"Don't take less than forty dollars a week," continued Jake. "You can get it, but don't sign no contract to let Max manage you. He'll charge ten per cent, and I'll do it for five. Remember, five per cent's as good to you as it is to Max. Now, how about costumes?"

Mollie answered that she had a couple which were nearly five years old but still looked new.

"What's the matter, kid?" inquired Jake. "Are you broke?"

Mollie told him of her hard times. When she had finished he turned away and pretended the smoke from his cigarette had got in his eye.

"Hard luck, kid, hard luck," he sympathized, gazing at the floor. "Just forget that five per cent I mentioned. I'm goin' to loan you fifty bucks and ain't goin' to charge no interest, neither—until you get on your feet. Rachel's a peach of a dressmaker, and she'll only be too glad to make a couple o' costumes for you, an' you can pay her for the work when you get the dough. But go careful; she's awful jealous, an' if she thought you was sweet on me she'd have a fit—and I'd ketch hell."

Mollie accepted his offer thankfully. I'm goin' to give the money to Rachel," he continued, as he wrote Max's address on a card and handed it to Mollie. "She can



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

get the stuff for half what you'll pay for it. Her father's in the silk business. I'll tell her you gave me the dough, an' that ain't no mean favor, neither, takin' chances like that with Rachel."

Mollie agreed smilingly, and with a light heart left for Max's office.

She hesitated before entering the door held open for her by an office boy. "Come in," commanded a cheery voice. "There ain't nothink that's goin' to bite you." Seated at a desk covered with papers was Max Goldstein, an elderly man, entirely bald and with a round, moonlike face which shot out rays of welcome.

Mollie entered at his invitation, ready to do or die. She had outlined a strict campaign for success, and was going to follow it to the letter.

Max, with a broad smile, which made Mollie feel like huggin' him, indicated a chair beside him and she sat down.

"Mr. Goldstein," she commenced, in a very business-like manner, "I was sent over from Rosenberg's. Jake spoke to you over the phone, I think."

"A smart feller, Jake," chuckled Max. "He told you not to sign it a contract with me. Didn't he?"

Mollie blushed, but did not answer.

"It's all right. I *know* Jake. How much do you *expect* for a salary?"

"I won't *take* less than forty dollars a week."

"Forty dollars a week!" cried Max, in mock amazement. "Forty dollars a week? You're crazy! For a principal in that *revue* I wouldn't charge Donnelly no less than fifty dollars." Max was figuring that 5 per cent of fifty was more than 5 per cent of forty.

"I meant to say fifty, Mr. Goldstein," apologized Mollie, weakly, hardly able to keep her feet still.

## ON HER OWN

"Listen, Miss Eastman," confided Max, with a wink. "When a Irish feller's got money like Donnelly, make him spend it. I'll give you a trial because Jake asked me." He pressed a button, and the office boy appeared. "Tell Miss Levine to put Miss Eastman's name down for that part in the *revue*."

Max rose from his desk to signify the interview was over.

Mollie thanked him and followed the boy out of the office.

"A girl with such a face and figure won't last long at Donnelly's," gloomed Max, as Mollie disappeared through the doorway. "That goniff should be arrested."

Then, shrugging his shoulders as if it were no concern of his, he sat down at his desk and commenced figuring how he could get Jake to relinquish his 5 per cent.

## XXX

### DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND

MOLLIE rehearsed a week with the *revue*, and Slade, the director, gave Max a flattering report of her ability. Max was delighted and called Jake on the telephone immediately.

"Hello, Jake! This is Max. She's what you said—a comer. Now listen, Jake. I should manage her and save you the trouble. I'll do something for you. I'll give you as a *present three per cent*. Shall I call it a business?"

The answer must have been in the negative, for Max continued, "I ain't goin' to discuss a business like that over no telephone. I'll see you to-night at the pinochle game," and hung up.

Monday night the *revue* was to open at Donnelly's. Mollie, now the proud owner of three handsome costumes which Jake's wife had made for her, was optimistic. The old nervousness of her first appearance of five years ago had disappeared completely. She was ready for anything.

Donnelly's had undergone many changes. The place had prospered and Donnelly believed in showing his patrons that it had prospered. The dance floor had been greatly enlarged and decorated elaborately; no expense had been spared.

The opening of a new *revue* was of great interest to Donnelly, because he liked to size up the girls and have first pick.

## DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND

Mollie's numbers made an instant hit, and she had to respond to many encores. Donnelly rubbed his hands with satisfaction. Here *was* a peach. He looked at her, quite puzzled. Somewhere he had seen her before, but he couldn't quite place her. On her second entrance his memory cleared. Why! She was the kid who used to plug songs with Joe Levy—the one who had given him the "go-by"; but she wouldn't get away from him this time.

He waited until she had concluded her last number and then sent the manager with a message that he wanted to see her in his upstairs office. The manager smiled to himself. He had been with Donnelly for years, and this wasn't the first trip of this nature he had made.

Mollie was not surprised when she received the summons. She was expecting it, sooner or later, and commenced changing to her street clothes.

"Never mind changing," ordered the manager. "Come up the way you are."

Mollie followed him to the office, where Donnelly was sitting at his desk, waiting for her. The manager paused, waiting orders.

"A quart of the best," drawled Donnelly, jerking his thumb in the direction of the door. Donnelly leered at Mollie in an insinuating way. "Didn't you plug songs here a few years back with Joe Levy?"

"Yes," affirmed Mollie, trying her best to overcome her repugnance, "about five years ago; but I was only a kid then."

Donnelly's face lighted; she certainly had given him a lead; at last she had got sense. There ought to be no difficulty for him now. "Yes," hummed he, "and a pretty fresh kid, if I remember right. Well, I suppose you've got over your nonsense by this time."

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

"I guess I have," replied Mollie. "You shouldn't blame me for what I did when I wasn't wise to the game."

Donnelly was quick to assure her that he didn't blame her. This was easier than he had expected. The manager entered with a bottle of champagne and two glasses. He opened the bottle, filled the glasses, placed them on the desk, and withdrew quietly.

"Have a drink," Donnelly invited, pushing a glass toward her. This was a problem she hadn't figured, but she pushed the glass carelessly away, as if she didn't care for any at the time. Her stratagem worked.

Donnelly gulped his wine and lighted a cigarette, then offered one to Mollie.

"Had to give them up," she replied, nonchalantly, although her heart was thumping wildly. "They hurt my voice."

"That's right, kid," agreed Donnelly. "Take care of the voice; it's *there*."

Molly resolved that she would. So far, she had won in every encounter.

"How much are you getting in the show?" inquired Donnelly, inhaling his cigarette deeply.

"Fifty bucks. That's what I was going to see you about. I'm worth at least a hundred, doing three singles and a double."

He eyed her searchingly, endeavoring to fathom whether it was a holdup on her part. His scrutiny must have convinced him in the negative, for he answered, "I'll tell the manager to make it seventy-five, and if you *behave* yourself, and *listen* to reason, the roof's the limit."

"I've got the best ear for reason you've ever seen," admitted Mollie, playing the game to the limit.

"I'm sorry, kid," he returned, glancing at his watch in a self-satisfied manner, "but I've got to go. Got a date

## DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND

over at Davis's place—a little roulette; otherwise we'd go out to supper; but I'll see you again. Now listen here. Lay off them guys downstairs. It's all right to mix with 'em and get 'em to buy drinks—that's business—but, remember, nothing else, because I'm *particular* who I travel with. Get me?"

Mollie nodded and ran downstairs to her dressing room, where the rest of the girls were waiting eagerly to learn the result of her interview with the boss.

Although she had won her first tilt with Donnelly, still she realized that she was playing with fire and that it would only be a short time before all of the cards would have to be laid on the table for a show-down, and she knew it would be then that the best hand would win. She determined her hand was going to be the winner, even if she had to stack the deck.

The girls crowded round her, all asking questions at once. "What did he say?" "Did he try to make a date with you?" "How much did he give you?" "They say he's a quick worker."

Most of them, at heart, were jealous of Mollie's pull with Donnelly. It was too bad she had to come into the show at the last minute and "crab" their chances. Two of the girls had worked at Donnelly's before, so they did not question her; they knew from personal experience what had happened.

"You're all wrong," exclaimed Mollie, holding up her hand for silence. "He only asked me what church I attended, and when I told him I didn't go to church he gave me the address of a place where they sell bibles."

Her answer was a polite way of telling them it was none of their business, and her stock rose rapidly in their estimation. They laughed at her reply and put her down as a "wise one."

## XXXI

### DRESSING-ROOM POLITICS

A KNOCK on the door, and the manager entered. There was immediate silence. "I just wanted to tip you off to the rules," he said, looking sharply at the girls. "It's all right to mix, and the boss wants it. You get twenty per cent on the drinks you sell, but, remember, no rough stuff. The first one that pulls any, out she goes. And don't get lit up between shows. Beer's all right, but no hard stuff. It's *down* drinks between shows, but after one o'clock you can drink your heads off. The waiters are wise. Order mixed drinks while you're working, but nothing but wine after the last show. Now that goes."

When he left there was a buzz of conversation. Here was a chance to make some real money for themselves. Several started to figure how many drinks they would have to sell to add twenty-five dollars to their weekly salary.

Mollie didn't know what he meant by "down" drinks, but hated to show her ignorance by asking. She resolved to keep her ears open. The question was soon solved by one of the girls. "They can go to the devil with their down drinks. Think I'm goin' to sit at a table all night drinkin' cold tea with a cherry in it, and call it a Manhattan?" The rest of the girls laughed.

One of the captains entered the dressing room without

## DRESSING-ROOM POLITICS

knocking. A blonde, hurriedly drawing her kimona together, addressed him in an angry voice:

"How do you get that way, walkin' into a dressin' room without knockin'? Think this is a pool parlor, or somethin'?"

"Aw, shut up!" retorted the captain, looking at her in contempt.

The blonde reached for a glass half filled with beer and threw the contents in his face. "Tell me to shut up, will you? You four-flusher!"

The captain wiped his face with his handkerchief and advanced menacingly toward her.

She raised the heavy glass over her head. "Come on!" she threatened. "If you're lookin' for trouble, you'll get it."

The captain paused, then, turning on his heel, left the dressing room. In a few minutes he returned with the manager and pointed her out. The manager inquired the trouble. The girls answered in chorus that the captain had gotten "fresh" in the dressing room and had refused to get out when Maggie had asked him to in a nice way.

The captain, purple with rage, denied it, but they all stuck together and swore it was the truth. "After this keep out of the dressing rooms unless you have business there, or take the consequences," advised the manager to the captain, scratching his head in perplexity.

When they had left the girls had a great laugh.

"Good for you, Mag," commended a tiny blonde. "It served him right. I guess these fresh guys 'll learn we ain't like the last bunch what worked here. I heard that the captains and waiters walked all over them."

"Well," growled Maggie, with bravado, "if they try



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

to walk over me, they'd better put their rubbers on, because I'm slippery."

There was a general laugh at her rejoinder. Some of them registered to themselves that in the future they would have no arguments with her; she could handle herself too well.

Mollie was a silent witness, but was thinking deeply. Perhaps, after all, Maggie's way was right.

Another knock at the door and, on an invitation to enter, a waiter looked in respectfully. "There's a party of four guys what wants to know if Miss Eastman and three other girls will have something to eat and drink with them?" he politely informed.

"Go on," urged Maggie, nudging Mollie in the side, "and take me in the party."

Mollie agreed. It would be something new, and she was looking for experience. She invited Maggie to go because, if help were needed, she had proved she could be relied upon. Two other girls volunteered.

"I ain't a bit hungry," laughed Maggie, as they left the dressing room. "Had a big supper just before the show, but watch me sting them birds!"

The four men introduced themselves to the girls. Maggie was evidently at home in these parties, because she picked up a menu and scanned it earnestly. She was paying no attention to the names of the dishes, but was noting the prices opposite them. One of the men, taking the hint, asked the girls if they would have something to eat. They quickly replied in the affirmative.

With a wink, Maggie suggested that she do the ordering. Mollie nodded assent. She was thoroughly enjoying herself.

"What do you say if we have a drink first?" queried Maggie, addressing the man beside her.

## DRESSING-ROOM POLITICS

"Go to it," he answered.

Turning to the expectant waiter, Maggie ordered four Manhattans, and held her thumb in an upright position.

He shook his head and whispered: "Against the rules. Nothin' but down drinks."

With a grimace, Maggie shrugged her shoulders. Then she commenced ordering. Every dish which had three figures after it was her choice. She would show them it cost real money for her company. The man next to her listened nervously to the order. Mollie was watching him intently, and had to turn her head away to keep from laughing. He was suffering tortures.

By the way they acted, it was apparent their hosts were from out of town. Maggie nudged Mollie under the table, and whispered, "How's crops?" Mollie got it and smiled.

When the drinks were served, Mollie bravely took her glass with the rest, and in answer to, "Here's luck!" from one of the men, she downed it. It was real tea. This was great, having all the fun drinking, but with no bad results. Maggie immediately ordered another round. The man next to her suggested they had better wait until after eating.

"Say," shrilled Maggie, pinching him lovingly on the arm and kicking Mollie under the table, "I drink at least twenty of them in an hour."

The man did some rapid mental figuring. Twenty in an hour at fifty cents each made ten dollars, and there were four girls. A grand total of forty dollars, and that was not counting the food and what they were going to drink themselves. By the wry face he made, he must have come to the conclusion that it was an expensive honor to sit with show girls.

The man next to Mollie was beginning to get sentimental. "Listen, girlie," he droned, moving his chair

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

closer. "You're too good to be working in a place like this. I—"

Maggie, overhearing, interrupted him. "Before this party goes any further, I want to tell you guys something. That stuff don't go—'You're too good to be working,' etc. Get something new. I've listened to that spiel just seven hundred and twelve times in the last two months—and thirteen's an unlucky number—so just can it."

The man blushed and did not reply, but he moved his chair away. The other three laughed at his expense. No sooner was a round of drinks gone than the waiter was on the job at Maggie's elbow. They must have worked together before; their team work was perfect. The cold tea didn't affect the girls, but the men were beginning to feel the effects of their real drinks. Maggie had no mercy on them, but kept ordering.

"I don't feel hungry now," she protested to the waiter, when he brought the food. "Send it up to the dressing room and I'll eat it later." He slyly winked at her with approbation. "You don't mind if I don't eat now," she asked of the men, "do you? It's so hard to work right after a hearty meal."

What else could they do but agree?

"There's a couple of live ones over at that table," whispered the waiter to Maggie, "and they want you to join them."

She nodded her head wisely and gave him a sign. He laughed and closed one eye. The cocktails were affecting her partner, and he was beginning to get "fresh," as she later styled it in the dressing room.

"Listen, dearie," she cooed, patting his hand. "My husband's over at the other table. You see, our baby is sick and John has come down to let me know how she is. You'll excuse me, I know."

## DRESSING-ROOM POLITICS

The man was too amazed to reply.

Maggie rose and bowed to the other three. "I am very pleased to have met you, and I hope I will see you again. Good night."

"Is that really her husband?" asked one of the men.

"Sure it's her husband," returned the girl opposite Mollie. "She's got nine kids. But that ain't nothin'. The three of us here is married, and our husbands call for us every night right after the show."

The men's faces fell. So far it had cost them about fifty dollars to entertain married women. "We've barely time to get our train," exclaimed one, looking at his watch hurriedly and assuming surprise. "Ask the waiter for our check."

This was a hint to the girls that the party was over. They got it, and all rose together. "It certainly was kind of you gentlemen to buy our supper," chirped one of them, throwing a shawl about her bare shoulders and winking at Mollie. "I hope you catch your train."

The "gentlemen" gazed in silence at the untouched food on the table.

Just before the call for the second show, Maggie tripped lightly into the dressing room where the girls were laughingly telling the rest about the four "boobs" they had trimmed.

"How much did you get out of them?" she inquired, curiously.

"Get out of them!" they shouted in chorus. "What do you mean?"

Maggie stared at them in amazement. "Do you mean to tell me you sat there for an hour and didn't get anything? Well, you poor simps!" Reaching into her stocking, she extracted a twenty-dollar bill, and waved it in the air. "The simp sitting next to me gave me this to

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

fix it up so we would meet them after the show. I fixed it, all right, with that husband stuff."

"Gee! Mag," wailed one of the diners, wistfully, "you sure are lucky. Twenty bucks!"

"Luck!" exclaimed Maggie, with contempt. "That ain't *luck*; it's *headwork*."

When the girls went on for the second show, the table at which the men had been sitting was vacant. They all hoped sincerely that the men would catch their train.

## XXXII

### THE CHORUS GIRL

**F**OR three nights Donnelly failed to appear at the cabaret, and it was whispered in the dressing rooms that he was on one of his periodical drunks, which was liable to last for a couple of weeks. Mollie breathed a sigh of relief and secretly hoped it would last forever.

She had been pestered with a flood of "mash" notes and invitations to late suppers, but had ignored them. Occasionally, out of policy, she "mixed" with some of the patrons of the place, but never alone; Maggie generally went with her as a bodyguard.

The waiters were commencing to complain to the manager that Mollie was not much of a mixer, and that on the very few occasions when she did condescend to sit at a table she was a "rotten" money getter, and in one instance, just because a fellow got a little too fresh, she abruptly left the table.

This man had heretofore been a good spender, but after Mollie had insulted him he had not shown up again. The consensus of opinion among them was that Mollie was hurting the business seriously. The manager listened patiently to their complaints, but took no action. He as yet did not know how good Mollie "stood in" with the boss, and was afraid to risk an issue. He was a diplomat, and in Donnelly's diplomacy of the first water was necessary to keep one's job.

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

The absence of Donnelly, coupled with her success, raised Mollie to the highest pinnacle of happiness. She was bubbling over with good spirits, and her laugh was constantly heard in the dressing room. When some of the chorus girls had the "blues"—and that is a common occurrence among them—they carried their troubles to her for advice. She listened attentively and sympathetically, and then her silvery laugh did the rest, and before long a chorus girl, who had threatened to surely take her life after the next pay day, was heartily joining in, and two laughs were heard instead of one.

During the first few nights the members of the show did not mix freely with Mollie. They wanted to get on to her game first, but as the time passed and they found out that she was a "regular fellow," and was not there to "crab" their chances, she was accepted in the fold.

There is more romance and tragedy in the chorus of a cabaret than in any other equal collection of human beings. Their methods may be crude and rough in the eyes of others, and their code of honor not quite up to the standard of a fashionable congregation, but, in justice to them, it must be admitted that they were not born that way.

A girl does not enter the chorus of a cabaret because she expects a life of ease and glory. In nine tenths of the cases a tragedy drove her there. Select a chorus girl at random and analyze her life, and the answer is, she has either been betrayed by a man, disappointed in love, or has been used roughly by the world in general.

She has been the prey of others, and, in the instinct of self-preservation, she uses the same methods on the men she mixes with as were taught to her by the ones who persecuted her. The average chorus girl has absolutely no respect for men; they are common prey to her. It is a battle between the two.

## THE CHORUS GIRL

The men mix with her for no good purpose. The girl knows this and realizes that their promises are nothing but lies; therefore the chorus girl uses the same weapons the men use—only, perhaps, with more skill.

Chorus girls, as a rule, do not go to the men; the men come to them, so some of you religious, pious people glance up from your hymn books and take a broader view of life, and do not condemn a girl to perdition just because she sings in the chorus of a cabaret. For, possibly, the highly respectable man sitting next to you in your pew may have been responsible for the entrance of at least one girl into cabaret, or, getting nearer home, perhaps the husband who is so loudly singing a hymn in your ear is framing an excuse to present to you later in the evening which will give him a chance to steal away to Donnelly's for a few hours and, of course, meaning no harm, to mix with the little blonde, third from the left.

After seeing these truths, and they are truths, do not hurriedly throw your hymn book down and rush to their rescue and try to uplift them to your high standards, for they do not wish to be uplifted by you. They will do their own uplifting, and perhaps in their minds your standards are a trifle below theirs.

But if you desire to accomplish some real good, go out into the world and help some poor struggling girl, not by preaching to her the evils of her ways, but by material assistance. Show her the beauties of life, point out a goal of happiness, so that she of her own volition will struggle toward it. Treat her as a human being, because, after all, she is human, and not something to be lifted from the mire with a long-handled fork. Help to remove the causes that are forcing her to enter the battle of life armed with the only two weapons left to her—her brain and her body.



### XXXIII

JIM CURTIS

SEVERAL nights later, during one of her numbers, Mollie observed, seated at a table directly in front of her, a youth and a girl. Her eyes were drawn irresistibly to the couple; there was something so different about them. They did not harmonize with the general atmosphere of the place. Immediately she became interested and fixed her gaze upon their rapt faces. The young man possessed the bloom of health and the clear-cut face which showed that dissipation as yet was a stranger to him. He was about twenty-three years of age, while the girl appeared nineteen. She stood out from the rest of the patrons like a violet blooming among weeds.

Mollie could see that, under the table, the girl was clasping the hand of her escort. Occasionally she turned her eyes from Mollie to gaze at him in a loving and motherly way, as if he, perhaps, needed protection, and she was there to take care of him. Mollie was fascinated; the adoration in the girl's eyes was something new in her life. She glanced at the youth quickly. He was gazing at her with admiration and worship in his eyes. Mollie stared hard at him, and then turned her gaze away. Something was beginning to show in his look which spoiled the beautiful picture. She looked back at him, but he dropped his gaze and blushed.

The girl saw the interchange of looks and realized there

## JIM CURTIS

was a lurking, unknown danger hovering over them. She placed her hand on his arm timidly and spoke to him. Mollie thought she saw a slight shade of annoyance cross his face, but was not sure.

In the dressing room the picture of the two flashed constantly before her, and she was impatient for her next number, so she could again observe them. When the time for her next number arrived she entered eagerly, but other people were occupying the table at which the couple had been sitting. She sensed a keen disappointment and the rest of the evening had no further interest for her. During the next day the faces of the couple kept reappearing to her.

That evening, on the opening of the *revue*, she looked in the direction of the table. The youth was there, but the girl was missing. This shocked Mollie in an unpleasant way. The youth watched closely every move she made, but their glances never met. He seemed to be afraid to look her in the eyes.

During the time between shows Mollie accepted an invitation to mix, and, with Maggie, sat at the table next to him. He was very ill at ease and kept ordering beer. Mollie could tell he was not used to drinking, because his face became flushed and his talk to the waiter was loud and boisterous. During the last show he was still there, but his eyes were bloodshot.

The next three nights he was at the same table, and during her numbers never took his eyes from Mollie. Finally, on the fourth night, the captain knocked at the dressing-room door and handed Mollie a note. She opened it curiously, because she was expecting it, and instinctively knew whom it was from. She read:

DEAR MISS EASTMAN (the waiter told me your name).—Please pardon my rudeness in writing you, but the waiter said you would not be offended if I invited you to sit at my table between per-

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

formances. I have noticed that you sit at other tables, so if you will oblige me by being my guest this evening, I will be a thousand times obliged.

Sincerely,

JAMES CURTIS.

P.S.—I will appreciate it if you come alone.

“That guy is nutty about you,” observed the captain, as she finished reading the note. “He’s been in here every night and follows you with his eyes like a puppy, but I don’t think he’s got much dough; only buys beer, and he don’t give away no libraries for tips.”

Curiosity prompted Mollie to accept his invitation. Before going out she carefully looked at herself in the glass. Somehow, this young fellow had impressed her, and she wanted to appear at her best.

She followed the waiter to his table. He rose from his seat and in a very embarrassed voice stammered:

“It’s quite a pleasure to meet you—Miss Eastman. I—I—think you are wonderful. That is—I—I—mean that you sing beautifully—and—of course—your dancing—is excellent.”

Mollie smiled at him in her most captivating manner and seated herself at his table. He asked her if she would have something to drink, and when she answered, “Thank you, I will,” she noticed a disappointed look on his face. But when the waiter asked her order and she said, “Ginger ale,” his face lighted. Very much embarrassed, he proffered her a cigarette, but she told him she didn’t smoke.

“Do you mean that you *never* smoke?” he inquired, in pleased surprise.

She answered in the affirmative.

“That’s wonderful!” he exclaimed. “I thought all cabaret girls—that is—I beg your pardon—all actresses smoked.”

## JIM CURTIS

"Well," returned Mollie, in an amused tone, "perhaps when I become an *actress* I *will* smoke."

"Please don't," coaxed he, leaning nearer. "Somehow or other I'd hate to know that *you* smoked."

Mollie was a little disappointed by his words. So, after all, it was the same thing over again; but she gave him a sharp glance, and a thrill went through her as she realized this man was in earnest and really wished she would not smoke. It gave her a strange, but not unpleasant, sensation to know there was at least one person in the world who had an unselfish interest in her.

Gradually under the warmth of her smile his embarrassment melted away and they were soon chatting merrily. Mollie was enjoying herself in a different way from any before in her life. The youth was in the seventh heaven of bliss. The waiter, standing behind her, was looking at her in disgust. Why didn't she get busy and order? But Mollie did not order; her glass of ginger ale stood untouched in front of her until the piano played the cue for the performers to get ready for the next *revue*. Excusing herself, she rose, and promised she would sit with him after the show.

During her numbers he turned red every time she glanced at him, and, very much embarrassed, weakly smiled in return. The other girls in the show were enjoying his discomfiture hugely, and while Mollie was changing costumes played up to him and tried to make him as uncomfortable as possible, and succeeded.

People sitting at other tables caught what was going on, and he was soon the general target for their eyes. He was suffering agonies of self-consciousness.

After the show Mollie sat with him for about fifteen minutes, until the waiter got insistent and suggested a couple of times that, "Perhaps the gentleman would pre-

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

fer a nice bottle of wine instead of ginger ale." With an angry glance at the waiter, she excused herself and left to get dressed. Curtis was waiting for her at the side entrance, and pleaded to let him escort her home in a taxi. Mollie refused, but very politely. Somehow she did not want him to know she lived on Third Avenue. Very much disappointed, he wished her good night.

For two hours Mollie was unable to sleep. Was she acting fairly to that sweet girl she had seen him with on their first night? She determined to ask him all about her when she saw him again.

The following night she sat with him and, after a few minutes' conversation, inquired, casually, "Who was the pretty girl sitting with you the first night you came in?"

"Oh, you mean Grace!" hesitated Curtis, blushing furiously and very much ill at ease. "She's known me all her life—a friend of my sister's." While saying this he avoided Mollie's eyes, and she surmised that he was lying, and, although she would not admit it, she felt disappointed. So, after all, he was like the rest—new face, new fancy. Well, she would show him.

"Listen, Jim" (she had, at his urgent request, promised to call him Jim). "Grace is your sweetheart, and she loves you; a blind person could see that. She doesn't know you are here, and I bet right now she's eating her heart out at home, wondering where you are."

He tried to expostulate, but she paid no attention and continued: "And I'm not going to come between two sweethearts. I like you, and you've been a gentleman at all times, but you just go back to Grace and keep away from cabarets. There's nothing in them for you. I'm going to say good-by to you, and I am glad to have met you, but you take my advice and stick to Grace."

## JIM CURTIS

Without listening to his protestations, Mollie rose, left the table, and went to her dressing room.

When she came on for the next show he was still there, and pleaded with his eyes to meet him afterward, but she ignored him.

During the finale Mollie, in a whisper, asked Maggie to walk a part of the way home with her, saying that she wanted to avoid some one. Maggie agreed.

Curtis was waiting at the door for Mollie, but before he had a chance to address her Maggie stepped rudely in front of him.

"How do you get that way?" she rasped, in a tough voice—"trying to push yourself on to a lady when you're not wanted."

Curtis recoiled as if some one had slapped him in the face. Mollie turned her head away. She felt sorry for him. He stared back at Maggie for an instant, then raised his hat politely and bowed. "I humbly beg your pardon, madam," he apologized, backing away.

Mollie could not sleep that night. She knew she had hurt some one, and the thought was not pleasant; but she reasoned it was all for the best and was only fair to Grace.

The next night Curtis was not at the table, and Mollie, although a trifle disappointed, was glad she had made him see the light. Donnelly was still absent on his spree and she was commencing to forget him.

The following night she was disagreeably shocked to see Curtis again sitting at a table. She avoided his gaze and felt very uncomfortable for the rest of the evening. Had she started something which was going to lead to trouble? He sent two notes to the dressing room, imploring her to see him, but she paid no attention to them.

During the last show it was plain that Curtis had been

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

drinking; his face was flushed and his eyes were unnaturally bright. There was a half-emptied champagne glass in front of him. He stared at her until he caught her gaze, then looked from her to the glass, as if threatening to drink himself to death if she did not come to him. His actions were so obviously childish that her pity changed to resentment.

The following evening he tried another tack. This time he had brought Grace with him, and, ignoring Mollie and the rest of the show, he paid marked attention to her. The poor girl was brimming over with delight and gazed at him with adoring eyes. His transparent ruse disgusted Mollie. They *were* all alike.

When Mollie returned to her dressing room the manager was waiting to tell her that Donnelly was upstairs and wished to see her immediately in his office. He also said it was Donnelly's orders that she was not to go on for the next show. Mollie's heart almost stopped beating at the unexpected tidings, but, smiling, she assented amiably.

Donnelly, with dark circles under his eyes, and trembling hands, leered at her when she entered. "Hello, kid! I've been on a hell of a toot and feel rotten, and I want some one to look after me, and that some one is you."

Mollie, in disgust, inwardly shrank from him, but she answered, bravely, "I'm awfully sorry to hear it, Mr. Donnelly—"

"Mister hell! To you my name's Jim. Come here an' give me a kiss."

Mollie could smell his terrible breath from where she stood, and nearly fainted at the thought of kissing such a beast.

"Don't want to kiss me, huh?" shouted he, wrathfully. "All right—but you're goin' with me to-night to the

## JIM CURTIS

sweetest little apartment you ever saw, and *then* I guess you'll kiss me."

Mollie turned white and backed timidly toward the door.

Donnelly laughed hoarsely; then, leaning over the desk, he grimaced at her. "Trying to duck out, are you?" he hissed between his teeth. "Well, for your information, that door's locked. There's a latch on the outside. They call this my bird cage, and I guess they're right, because this time I've caught a regular nightingale."

Mollie did some quick thinking, and followed it with quicker action. Slowly edging away so that the desk was between them, she smiled coquettishly. "You've got me wrong, Jim," she laughed. "For the love o' Mike! have some sense. Here you go away and get stewed to the gills, without even sending me word, and then, when you turn up suddenly, you expect me to fall all over you. Well, take it from me, you don't know this chicken."

"Getting jealous, are you?" returned Donnelly, in surprise, but with a pleased look stealing over his rum-bloated face. "Well, kid, I guess I didn't treat you right, did I?"

"Of course you didn't," replied Mollie, airily, still desperate and fighting for every advantage, "but you can't pull any rough stuff on me. If you want me to go to your apartment after the show, you'd better unlock that door and say you're sorry—and damned quick, too."

"That's the way I like 'em," he chuckled as he sat back drunkenly and pressed a button on his desk. "A little temper and lots of jealousy. That shows there's plenty of love when the time comes."

In answer to the ring, the manager entered. "Take this bottle away," ordered Donnelly, "and on your way out, take the latch off the door."

"Now you're talking sense, Jim," approved Mollie,



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

when the manager had left. "I'll see you after the show." Then she turned her back bravely and walked slowly from the office, while Donnelly, watching her, lustfully followed her with his eyes, his face glowing with satisfaction.

Reaching her dressing room, with the help of Maggie she packed her suitcase quickly, amid the wonderment of the other girls. Biding her opportunity, she slipped unseen through the back entrance. Once on the street, she felt safe, and breathed a sigh of relief.

Arriving home, she confided to Mary what had happened, and it was all she could do to prevent her from telling her husband. Mollie did not desire any outside interference. She could fight her own battles, and she was going to win.

When Donnelly learned that Mollie had outwitted him he cursed with rage and swore vengeance.

## XXXIV

### "INSIDE STUFF"

**D**AVIS was sitting in the reading room of his luxurious apartment over his gambling house at — West Fifty-seventh Street, waiting impatiently the arrival of Inspector Mulvaney, who had telephoned that trouble was brewing.

It had not been the first time Mulvaney had "gone up in the air" over something which later proved to be a false alarm, so Davis was in no way disturbed, except that he hated to waste time on his "inferiors," hence his impatience.

A light on the table, cleverly concealed by two books, flashed twice. It was the signal from the lookout that some one on the "inside" wished to see the boss. Davis pressed a button and waited.

The door opened and Mulvaney timidly entered. Davis, with an inquiring uplifting of the eyebrows, motioned him to a seat. Mulvaney respectfully removed his hat and sat down, waiting for Davis to speak. Davis believed in showing people in his power that they were dirt beneath his feet and that he brooked no familiarity from them, so he ignored the nervous inspector, who fidgeted in his chair.

Five years had aged Mulvaney considerably. There was a worried expression on his face and his gaze was shifty. The hair around his temples was turning gray, and a nervous twitching of the muscles intimated that he had succumbed to the use of drugs.

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

"Well," demanded Davis, irritably, "what's worrying you now? You're always digging up imaginary trouble. You'd better keep away from the 'snow,' or it will get you."

"It's not imaginary this time," responded Mulvaney, ignoring the reference to cocaine. "That damn-fool vice committee, backed by a few big men, has at last persuaded the mayor that a change of police commissioners will do New York a lot of good."

"Is that all you've got to tell?" interrupted Davis, impatiently. "This is the third time you've been crying about it. Didn't I prove to you the last time why the mayor won't listen to that bunch?"

"I know you did, but things have taken a turn. There's no bull about it this time. The mayor has asked the commissioner to resign. I saw the letter."

"The hell you say!" ejaculated Davis, almost jumping from his chair. "Is that on the level? Are you sure?"

"As sure as I'm sitting in this chair," replied Mulvaney, "and I know there's goin' to be a hell of a shake-up in the department."

Davis, at the news, bit his lower lip and thought deeply. "Who's going to get the job? Has it been decided yet?"

Mulvaney moved a little closer to him. "The mayor's secretary tipped me off it was to be Ferguson, and you know what that means. He's dead against gambling and has threatened to close every joint in the city, protection or no protection. And you know Harris, the guy who lost seventy thousand here, is a close friend of Ferguson's and made an awful squeal to him. Your place is first on the list."

"Ferguson—Ferguson—" pondered Davis to himself. "I wonder if it's the same bird who was mixed up with Nannette about a year ago?"

## "INSIDE STUFF"

Mulvaney rose to go. Although he hated the sight of Davis, still he was afraid of him. He had looked forward to this errand with the keenest delight, but Davis, though worried at his intelligence, did not let him see that it affected him. Mulvaney was disappointed; he expected Davis to fly into a rage.

"There's nothing to worry about," growled Davis. "Just keep posted and tip me off as soon as there's a move. That's all."

Mulvaney hesitated. He had still another message to deliver.

"Well?" exclaimed Davis, interrogatively.

"I don't like to bother you," whined Mulvaney, clearing his throat, "but the chief said you had something to give him on the last deal."

Davis went to a safe in the wall, opened it, took out a tin box, counted some bills of large denomination, and handed them to Mulvaney.

"The two top ones are for you," he said. "Tell the chief he's got to go a little easy. It's not coming in as fast as it used to."

Mulvaney thanked him, took the two bills, placed them in his trousers pocket, then carefully arranged the larger roll and put it in his inside coat pocket. "I do the dirty work," he moaned to himself when he was in the hall, "and the chief collects the big end."

When Mulvaney had gone, Davis sat by the table and figured on a piece of paper. "If Ferguson gets in," he mused, "I've got to make hay while the sun shines. No doubt, he'll close everything tight for a few months. Anyway, it's about time I pulled a little rough stuff and cleaned up."

He was forgetting that years ago, while he was still climbing the ladder, he had determined that rough stuff

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

didn't pay and meant the beginning of the end. But prosperity and success change a man's perspective materially; the more he gets the more he wants. This was true of Davis; he was getting careless and reckless.

He returned to the safe, got out a book, and scanned a list of names beginning with "F." Suddenly his fingers stopped on a name and a look of satisfaction lighted his face. He read:

Ferguson, J. H., mixed up in the Carter case. See Muldoon's note of January 6th. Also intimate with Harding and has stock in his International Chemical Company. Was out with Nannette several times. Girl in Palais Jardin received five thousand to quit writing to him.

He closed the book, put it back in its place, and reached for some papers in another pigeonhole. Looking through them and selecting one, he went over to the table, sat down, and read:

(Muldoon. January 6th). Haggerty, M. J., No. 143678. Manslaughter. Ten years. Entered Sing Sing Dec. 8, 19—. Claims Ferguson, J. H., retired merchant, interested in Reform Movement, paid him two thousand to keep his name out of Carter case. His letter on outside. Wants five thousand for it. Lowest he will go. Nellie Carter, shot by Haggerty, April 4th, 19—, at Albany, Gerke's place, in row over Johnston. See Criminal record No. 14954.

Davis read, and his smile broadened. "All right," he muttered, as he returned the record to the safe and twirled the combination. "Let him close me up, and see what happens."

## XXXV

### MULDOON, ALIAS MORGAN

A TRAIN pulled into the Grand Central Station and the usual crowd of passengers poured through the open gate. But there was one among the crowd whom it had taken five years to make a journey of thirty-two miles. Pretty slow traveling, but many take longer. The passenger was Johnny Muldoon, but he was known as Muldoon no longer. He had changed his name to Robert Morgan, because it is inconvenient to be called by the same name which appears on a prison register, for sometimes it leads to complications. A Central Office man, standing at the exit, tapped him on the shoulder as he passed. He turned as if expecting the salutation, took a paper from his pocket and showed it to the detective, who scanned it carefully and then handed it back.

"Better watch your step," he warned, gruffly. "We're on to you guys."

"Ah, go to hell!" muttered Muldoon, and was soon lost in the crowd. He was on his way to keep an appointment with his friend and benefactor—Davis.

Just before entering New York, Muldoon had braced himself with an extra heavy "shot" of cocaine. So now, instead of an ex-convict sneaking back to hide in the dark alleys of a city, he imagined he was a conquering general,

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

entering at the head of his victorious army to take possession.

Johnny emerged from the Grand Central Station and looked around cautiously, his prison instinct paramount, despite the hallucinations of cocaine. Spying a waiting taxi at the curb, he gave the driver an address and got into it. Once seated, he breathed a long, full breath. The air of freedom, helped by the cocaine, caused the blood to race through his veins. This minute was well worth waiting five years for. He framed his head in the window of the taxi and peered curiously out at the swiftly moving panorama of city life.

Every object to him was of profound interest. At last he was free to collect his debt from humanity, and the future unrolled before him as one long sweet period of bliss. There would be no more torturing, hellish waits for the underground messenger to arrive with his magic powder. The money he had earned as a "go between" would enable him to lay in a mountain-high store of cocaine which would last him forever.

The taxi swerved as it narrowly escaped hitting a vehicle, and he leaned farther out the window; a traffic policeman was holding up his hand majestically for the car to stop. At sight of the blue uniform he quickly withdrew his head and crouched in the corner of the seat and held his hands in front of his face to screen it from view. Then, remembering suddenly he was in no danger from the law, he peered out arrogantly at the policeman and tried hard to look the officer in the eye, but the ordeal was too great and he turned his gaze away. The policeman, after warning the driver to be more careful, let him proceed on his way. Johnny involuntarily sighed with relief.

The taxi stopped before an imposing brownstone front

## MULDOON, ALIAS MORGAN

and Johnny got out uncertainly, thinking, perhaps, that the driver had made a mistake. Could this beautiful house be the abode of Davis? He asked the driver if it was the right number, and, being assured it was, he paid his fare and climbed the steps of the mansion timidly. Following Davis's instructions, he pressed the button once, and then followed quickly with two short rings. The front door opened cautiously.

"Who do you want to see?" inquired an attendant in evening dress, sharply.

"I don't want to see anyone."

"What number do you want?"

"Twelve," replied Johnny.

Upon this reply the massive door swung inward and the doorman conducted Johnny into a beautifully furnished anteroom. "I'll tell him you're waiting," he said, as he left on his errand.

Johnny at first looked around curiously; then, in awe, he sat on the edge of a massive settee to wait word from Davis.

In a few minutes the doorman returned and signaled for Johnny to follow him. He led the way up a circular staircase. On reaching what Johnny judged to be the third floor, the man pointed to a door and disappeared down the winding stairs.

Repeating the knock he had given on the front door, he waited expectantly. The door opened and Davis motioned for him to enter.

With a welcoming smile, Johnny proffered his hand, but Davis ignored it. In hurt surprise his hand dropped limply to his side. This was a fine reception from his friend and partner in crime.

Following Davis into the room, he stood awkwardly waiting, but Davis lighted a cigarette and purposely paid



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

no attention to him. He had determined previously that Johnny must be put in his place, and the only way to do it was to show he was master.

Johnny shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. This meeting an old friend was worse than a trip to the warden's office.

Davis, without inviting Johnny to be seated, said, with a threatening look, "Now that you're out, you'd better walk pretty straight with me, or back you go for another dose."

Johnny cringed at the harsh words and his spirits wilted. He had been looking forward to a cordial reception from his only friend on the outside, and this was what he got.

"There are still two charges against you, and if I want to press them, you'll go up the river for ten years—and without dope, too.

Johnny shuddered.

"But I'm going to give you a chance," added Davis, after a long pause.

Johnny's hopes rose.

"That is, if you behave yourself and follow orders," concluded Davis.

Johnny mumbled his thanks.

"I'm running a swell layout here," said Davis, interrupting him, "and I need a man like you to trim a few live ones. The man I'm going to turn you over to will wise you up in the details. He's manager here, and his say goes. But remember this, *keep your mouth shut and your eyes and ears open.*" He pressed a button. In a couple of minutes the door opened and a short, thickset, bald-headed man, attired in evening dress, entered and bowed respectfully to Davis.

"Peters, this is Muldoon," announced Davis, indicating Johnny by a jerk of his thumb "the one I spoke to you

## MULDOON, ALIAS MORGAN

it. From now on he goes under the name of Robert gan. That's right, isn't it?" he asked, frowning at my.

Johnny bowed his head in reply, his spirit broken.

Put him next to the ropes," finished Davis, "but don't him on the brace game until he gets to know the ers."

sters bowed low to Davis and instructed Johnny to w him. Johnny motioned timidly to Davis that he ed to speak to him alone, but Davis scowled and ted to the door. Johnny's heart sank as he followed nanager from the room.

## XXXVI

### ON BROADWAY

**F**OR several days Mollie stayed in the house. Although she refused to admit it to herself, she was deathly afraid of Donnelly. At last, mustering courage, she set out to look for work. She called Jake on the telephone and had a long talk with him. He had already heard about her affair with Donnelly and frankly admitted it was serious. He told her Donnelly was a man who would never forgive a girl who had made a fool of him. The news had leaked out in the cabaret, and Donnelly was the butt of all kinds of jokes from his patrons. He prided himself, where women were concerned, that he was the champion "heart breaker" of the Tenderloin, and ridicule wounded him sorely.

Furthermore, Jake told Mollie, Donnelly had great influence with the booking agents, and if he blacklisted a girl it would be next to impossible for her to get work in a New York cabaret. Years before, a girl, Dora by name, had worked for Donnelly and had turned him down for a gambler named Davis, who in turn threw her over. Then Donnelly had persecuted her to such an extent that, unable to get work and utterly disheartened, she had committed suicide. Mollie was horrified, and her future looked black. Jake promised he would try to get her something, but she was not to mention his name, because, if Donnelly found out, he wouldn't last long with Rosen-

## ON BROADWAY

berg. Before hanging up the receiver he added, in a very solemn voice, "and, Mollie, this ain't no mean favor, neither."

Mollie thanked him heartily, but, "Can it! Can it!" returned over the wire, followed by a sharp click in her ear as he hung up the receiver.

Mollie went back to Mrs. Newman's and, sitting on the bed, communed with herself. "I've thrown God down, and I guess He's off me for life. But I was the first to quarrel, so I can't blame Him. I'll live straight so long as they'll let me, but if the worst comes to the worst they'd better look out for me, because from now on I'm against everything except Mollie Eastman. If Jake gets me a job I'll do my best and fight them off until the last minute, then—"

She dared not peer into the future after the "then." Crying to herself, she buried her face in the pillows. If Mrs. Henderson had not been taken away she would have had a friend to comfort her, but now she was all alone, and the whole world, excepting Jake and Mary, was pitted against her in an unequal fight. Her resentment against God increased; she, in her ignorance, blamed Him for her troubles.

Wiping the tears from her eyes, she rose determinedly from the bed, went to the dresser, picked up her mother's photograph, and gazed long and earnestly at it. "Mother dear," she murmured, "I've turned God down, so I'll have to fight in my own way. Perhaps I am wrong, but I can't help it. Mother, I'm going to put you away safely in my trunk. I don't want you to keep watching me, because you will only weaken my resolve, but when I succeed and I am not ashamed to look you in the face I'm going to take you out again."

Painstakingly she wrapped the photograph in tissue

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

paper; then, firmly backing it with two layers of thick cardboard, went over to her trunk and placed it reverently at the bottom; then, one by one, she arranged her clothes over it, as a mother would bury her dead child.

As she returned the trunk tray to its place she murmured, "Good-by, mother dear," and with tears rolling down her cheeks she crossed to her dresser and powdered them away.

Two weeks passed and, although aided by Jake's efforts, she was unable to secure work. Even at Max Goldstein's the evil influence of Donnelly was felt. Max sympathized with her, but said, frankly, that he could not afford to take sides in a quarrel between a proprietor and a performer. He admitted Donnelly should be behind prison bars, but still, for business reasons, he had to be friendly with him.

Mollie, thoroughly discouraged, rose to leave, but Max called her back and in a fatherly way placed his arm gently around her waist.

"I ain't a rich feller," he reflected, "but perhaps you need it a little money for board, huh?"

Too pent up with emotion to answer, Mollie shook her head slowly in response to Max's offer. He scratched his chin in perplexity. What could he do with a girl like this whom he knew was up against it and yet she refused money?

"I've got it a daughter about your age," he consoled, drawing her closer. "I shall write a note to a friend of mine at the Palais Jardin. He is a big fellow and runs it the whole show. Perhaps we see, huh?"

Hurriedly scribbling a note and inclosing it in an envelope, he handed it to Mollie. "Don't give it the note to nobody else but Mr. Murphy," he instructed, then paused. "Sure he's Irish," he continued, in an apologetic

## ON BROADWAY

voice, "but this one is honest." With a twinkle in his eye, he bade her good-by.

Before going to the Palais Jardin, Mollie called Jake on the telephone and informed him of her good news. He was not so optimistic, because he knew Donnelly very often visited the Palais Jardin, but, fearing to discourage her, he neglected to mention the fact. He congratulated her and wished her success, knowing she would make good if not hindered by Donnelly.

Mollie delivered the note to Mr. Murphy, who looked her over critically, but in a way which did not offend her.

"All right, Miss Eastman," he grinned. "We rehearse to-morrow morning at ten. Tell Max I'll do anything for *him*; *he's* the only *honest* Jew I know."

Mollie was half an hour early for rehearsal and had to sit around until eleven o'clock before her turn came. She made a hit immediately and was engaged.

"Miss Eastman," informed Mr. Murphy, calling her to one side, "you are more or less new to the work, therefore I can only start you at a hundred and a quarter per week."

Somehow Mollie managed to keep her balance. One hundred and twenty-five dollars a week! Her knees shook.

"Thank you, Mr. Murphy," she answered, recovering her composure, "but of course if I make good I will expect a little more." She was not forgetting that she was playing the game.

"If you make good and the people like you, you'll get what we pay our regular principals—one hundred and seventy-five dollars for seven days."

Mollie trod on air all the way home. She was tempted to rush to her trunk, take out her mother's picture, and kiss it. She had won success, and was on Broadway in the swellest *revue* in New York. Then she thought of Donnelly and bit her lip and walked away from the trunk.

## XXXVII

### DAVIS TAKES A TRICK

**T**HE mayor, upon the resignation of the police commissioner, appointed Ferguson in his place. The newspapers came out with front-page headlines, announcing his appointment and commending the mayor for his nerve and judgment. They attacked the police department bitterly and stated that never before in the history of New York had the city been so corrupt. To quote one daily:

Crooks flaunt their crimes in the eyes of the police and openly defy the courts to convict them. A respectable girl is unsafe on the streets in certain sections of the city. Gambling is carried on in a brazen and open manner, and disreputable houses are springing up like mushrooms, etc., etc.

Davis read the papers, and held a long conference with Muldoon, alias Morgan, and then sent him to buy the letter which Haggerty, convict No. 143678, claimed Ferguson had written him.

In the new commissioner's office a different scene was taking place. Ferguson, in conference with his inspectors, was laying down the law.

"Gentlemen, I have been appointed commissioner of this department, and I am going to be *commissioner*. The city of New York is reeking with crime and vice, and I'm going to clean it up. From now on the lid is to be screwed

## DAVIS TAKES A TRICK

down tight. I need your co-operation, and I *expect to get it.*"

The inspectors nodded, and the commissioner continued:

"There's a man named Davis who openly runs one of the crookedest gambling establishments in the city, and I've heard he boasts that no one can close him up. Well, *I'm* going to close him up, and, in addition, put him in jail. I want his place raided to-night, and I'm going to be present. If he is tipped off in advance, I will know where to look for the guilty party."

With this last sentence the commissioner glanced down the line of inspectors. The majority stood the test without misgivings, but these were the honest ones, and at heart they were glad to see that at last a *man* had taken the helm. Mulvaney and three others were quaking with fear. How much did the commissioner know? Had some one squealed to him? They would have to watch their steps if they wanted to get by. They saw the handwriting on the wall, and it was written in English.

The commissioner dismissed them, and called his secretary, who had been an interested listener. Ferguson had retained him because he had been recommended highly by the mayor for his zeal and honesty.

"Well, I've got two or three of them guessing, and if Davis gets the information we will know where to look for corruption in the force."

"Yes, sir," answered the secretary.

Thirty minutes later, while out to lunch, he stepped into a private booth and called Davis. Cautiously looking around, he whispered into the transmitter: "Ferguson is going to raid you to-night and will be there himself. Clean up. This is Joe."

"Thanks," answered Davis. "Keep me posted the usual way."



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

The secretary hung up the receiver, returned to the commissioner's office, and was soon busily engaged in taking *confidential* dictation.

Davis, cursing to himself, called Peters into the room and gave him some rapid instructions. Peters, very much excited, left hurriedly to do his master's bidding.

That night the establishment was "raided" by Ferguson's men, but the door did not have to be battered in. Instead, it was opened courteously to their first knock by an exceedingly respectful doorman. The detectives, pushing him aside, rushed in. In the main saloon, which ordinarily would have been crowded with men and women eagerly wagering big stakes at many different games, was now almost deserted. The gambling paraphernalia had disappeared. An orchestra at the far end of the room, at a signal, commenced playing, and the floor was soon occupied by dancing couples. Davis, in immaculate evening dress, was the smiling and charming host.

The new commissioner entered behind his men. At sight of the dancing couples his face fell. So, after all, there *was* a leak among the inspectors. He and his secretary would get on the job in the morning.

"You've got a hell of a nerve to bust into a place this way," snarled Davis, addressing the commissioner.

"You take a tip from me, Davis," replied the commissioner, red with rage and exasperation. "This place from now on is going to be closed tight. You got away with it this time, but look out."

Davis laughed in his face, then turned on his heel insolently and walked away. Ferguson was speechless. The detectives searched the house thoroughly, but could secure no evidence. They were afraid to arrest the guests because nothing could be proved against them, and as for

## DAVIS TAKES A TRICK

Davis, not one of them wanted to be responsible for even *suggesting* his arrest.

The commissioner left with vengeance in his heart. This was augmented greatly at the breakfast table the following morning when he read the reports of his wonderful "raid" of the night before. The papers, without exception, ridiculed unmercifully the new commissioner's first attempt to "clean up New-York."

He was also the laughing stock of the crook element.

At his office he dictated to his secretary a plan of investigation which even made that conscientious and honest servant of the law sit up and take notice. This new commissioner was certainly *there* when it came to sticking to a thing.

That afternoon a messenger waited two hours to see the commissioner, but was unsuccessful. Finally he left the building and telephoned to Davis and then returned. Pretty soon the secretary's telephone bell rang, and he answered it. In two minutes' time the messenger had delivered his note to the commissioner.

Commissioner Ferguson opened the typewritten note, and read:

Lay off Davis. He has letter written to Haggerty by you reference Nellie Carter case.

NANNETTE.

Ferguson frowned. This would never do; the letter would ruin him if it were published. True, it was nothing very serious, only an escapade of the past, but still, he could not afford to have it brought to light; it would need a lot of explaining. He thought awhile, then tore the note into tiny bits and threw them into the waste basket. He fumbled with some papers on his desk before addressing his secretary.

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

"Wilson, I've been thinking over that Davis incident of last night, and I guess, for a while at least, we had better let him run wild so he will convict himself and will pull something which will give us a chance to land him right."

The secretary agreed. His great forte was in being a "yes boy."

The next morning the commissioner noticed that the eyes of his secretary looked tired, as if he had spent a sleepless night. He had—piecing together the tiny bits of the note which Ferguson had thrown into the waste basket. It had been no easy task, but he had succeeded and had been well rewarded for his efforts. He had got something on the commissioner, so for the future he could rest easy.

Without letting him know he was aware of the contents of the note, Wilson telephoned to Davis the commissioner's new attitude toward his gambling house.

Davis hung up the receiver and whistled with satisfaction. He had staked everything on one throw and had won.

The note to the commissioner had been typed by him and was a lucky guess. He had not taken this risk until Muldoon had informed him that Haggerty's sister had destroyed Ferguson's letter, thinking it worthless.

Now that the commissioner was in his power, Davis threw caution to the winds and got so "raw" in his methods that the patronage of his gambling house diminished alarmingly. It was whispered that "brace" games were being run and a few of his patrons threatened to make trouble.

Davis handled them in a diplomatic way and convinced them, with the exception of two or three, that the place was being run on the level. The others he hushed by returning the money they claimed to have lost.

## DAVIS TAKES A TRICK

This cost him over one hundred thousand dollars, and he vowed he would get five times that amount out of the next victims which came his way.

His patrons got fewer and fewer and he was greatly worried. Some way he would have to get people into his place or else close down. Getting them in was the hard part; relieving them of their money after they were in was the easy part.

Inspector Mulvaney, the judge, and several others had warned him repeatedly that he was taking too many risks and that he couldn't last, because things had reached the breaking point, but Davis disregarded their warnings. He was staking everything on the hold he had on Commissioner Ferguson.

Another thing worried him. Nannette used to be very valuable in bringing men to the place, but even she, of late, was failing. He figured that he needed a new face for a decoy. Nannette was too well known on Broadway and had ceased to attract. She and her jealousy were also getting on his nerves. She expected him to actually *love* her. Well, at the first favorable opportunity, if he could get some one to take her place, he would "frame" her and send her "up the river," where she wouldn't be heard from for years.

Accordingly, in one of his conferences with Muldoon he instructed him to keep his eyes open for a girl who would help the "business."

## XXXVIII

### THE FRAME-UP

**M**OLLIE had made an instant hit on Broadway. Her salary had been raised twice, until she was now drawing two hundred a week. She repaid Mary for burying Mrs. Henderson, but she was not happy. Nearly every day she came in contact with something which jarred her. She received mash notes continually, and after the show there would be several men waiting for her at the stage entrance, but she paid no attention to them, not because she thought herself too good, but because they did not interest her.

Donnelly had visited the Palais Jardin a couple of times, but had not attempted to get in touch with her. Jake kept warning her constantly to be careful of him—that this was the method he used, and that when he did strike it would be sudden and deadly.

Mollie began to regard him as an alarmist. In her mind she had decided that Donnelly had given her up and had turned his attentions elsewhere; otherwise he would have been hanging around and annoying her.

Mollie, for policy's sake, mixed quite a little between shows. The people she met were so different from those she had been accustomed to meeting at Donnelly's. They talked better English and wore better clothes and were far more polite, but they were all out for the same thing. Because she was winning, she enjoyed the game of matching her wits against theirs.

## THE FRAME-UP

As yet she had not reached the point of accepting gifts from them. Her instinct told her this would be the beginning of the end. With her salary of two hundred dollars a week there was nothing to worry about. She was not extravagant, but, after paying what she owed to Mary and Jake, and dressing herself, there was not much left at the end of the week, and pay day was always welcome. There are so many expenses in the show business that a girl has to hustle to make both ends meet.

One evening Mollie was greatly surprised to see Jim Curtis sitting at one of the tables. He smiled at her and she smiled back. From then on he was a constant visitor. Even so, he made no attempt to speak to her or to meet her after the show.

Muldoon, alias Morgan, known to his more intimate cronies as "Rat" Morgan, strolled into the Palais Jardin to watch the show. He had been tipped off that there was a girl there who, if he could get her, would be invaluable to Davis.

He had no misgivings about the ability of Davis to get her. What he desired to find out was whether she was worth the getting.

Morgan had to make good, because lately Davis had been looking with disfavor on him and, deep in his heart, he knew that he would never be able to "buck" him. Roulette Jack could break him as easily as a toothpick, and it would be an easy matter for him to frame him and send him back to his gray-walled home "up the Hudson."

Davis had told him to get a girl who would be able to bring suckers to the mill for "trimming," and Morgan was going to get her if he had to search New York. He had met several whom he thought would answer the requirements, but when Davis saw them he turned them

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

down for some reason or other inexplicable to him, and, instead of being commended for his efforts, he caught hell.

The Rat watched the show with a critical eye. So far no one had come up to his idea of what Davis wanted. Then Mollie entered for her first song. She was greeted with a generous burst of applause. Evidently she was a favorite. Morgan became interested immediately. At last he had found a girl to fill the bill.

He sat through the show twice, and then telephoned Davis that he had found the one who, without doubt, would answer all requirements. Davis made an appointment to go with him the following night.

When Mollie entered her dressing room after her last song she was surprised to see a strange man and two of the chorus waiting for her. The man gripped her roughly by the arm and growled, "You're pinched."

Mollie, in surprise, asked him what he meant.

"Aw, can that surprise stuff. We've got the goods on you this time, all right. I've been laying for you for two weeks."

Mollie was dumfounded. She arrested? What for?

"This is your jack and ring, ain't it, kid?" demanded the detective, speaking to one of the chorus girls.

"Yes, they're mine," the girl answered, "and she stole them, too. I saw her go in my room and take 'em from the dressin' shelf. It ain't the first thing that's been missed around here, either."

Mollie turned white and feebly grasped the edge of the dressing table for support. The detective, noticing her condition, pushed her into a chair. Suddenly, in gasping sobs, she cried: "I didn't steal anything. It's a lie—a cruel lie. I didn't steal anything!"

"Shut up that bellowing!" shouted the detective, placing his hand roughly over her mouth. "It won't get

## THE FRAME-UP

you nowhere. You're up against it, and you better make a clean breast of it, right now."

He ordered the two girls to leave the room, but to hold themselves in readiness as witnesses. "Now listen, kid," he said to Mollie in a softer voice when the girls had gone. "You're good for about five years in the pen. The dope is all against you. Them two girls will swear on the stand they saw you take the stuff, and I'll swear I found it in your street clothes. So what chance have you got? I'll admit," and he lowered his voice, "that it's a frame-up, but up the river you go. Nothing can save you."

Mollie, sobbing, was giving way to a hopeless, despairing look.

"You can't buck Donnelly," the detective went on, in a whisper. "He framed this, but he told me to say that if you wanted to look at things in the right way everything would be 'jake.' He said he'd give you three days to think it over in. The girls will keep their traps shut and no one will be the wiser. There ain't no use tryin' to duck out; that won't do no good, because you'll be shadowed. Now, kid, take a tip; be wise and give in. You can't buck that guy."

Mollie raised her tear-stained face and peered in the glass. So this was the game. At last Donnelly had her in his power. There was no use fighting further; the odds were too great.

"All right," she faltered, dabbing at her eyes with her handkerchief. "I know when I'm licked. Come around in three days and I'll let you know."

The detective took hold of her arm in a viselike grip and squeezed it until she winced from pain. "Don't try to pull any funny stuff," he threatened, "because if you do it's up the river you go. Now remember." Scowling at her, he left the room, slamming the door behind him.



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Mollie put on her things, carefully removed all traces of crying, and went to the street door. Jim Curtis was waiting for her.

"Pardon me, Miss Eastman," he said, raising his hat, "but I wish to explain something to you. Will you honor me by having supper with me?"

Mollie made up her mind in an instant. "Well," she smiled, extending her hand graciously, "I'm certainly glad to see you again, Jim, and I will be delighted to have supper with you."

Curtis was so surprised at her unexpected greeting that he disregarded her proffered hand and stammered some unintelligible reply.

His embarrassment evaporated rapidly, and by the time they reached the front entrance to the Palais Jardin he had assumed command.

He engaged a booth and, without asking her permission, ordered champagne. For the first time in her life Mollie drank, and liked it, and then drank more. Her troubles promptly faded and she was happy. Here at last was real life. What a fool she had been not to have discovered it sooner. Unused to the wine, she became very drowsy, and it was not long before she was fast asleep, with her head resting on Curtis's shoulder. He had, prior to this, obtained her permission to allow him to write to her, and she had scribbled her address on one of his cards. It had been quite a shock to learn that one so beautiful lived on Third Avenue, and over an undertaking shop, too, but the wine soon removed his qualms.

Mollie's condition attracted the attention of a party in the next booth, who giggled among themselves and cast knowing glances at Curtis. Very ill at ease, he tried to awaken her, but was unsuccessful. So, after paying his bill, he, with the help of the waiter, almost carried her to

## THE FRAME-UP

a taxi. She was nearly helpless, and was murmuring to herself. Then Curtis had his first real fight with himself. Should he take her home or should he—? He stood on the curb, thinking deeply. The taxi driver, standing by, touched him on the arm impatiently.

"I know a hotel," he volunteered, winking at Curtis. "Swell place, too, and no questions asked. Shall I drive you there?"

Curtis stared into space and then glanced at the helpless form of the girl. Should he accept? "All right," he snapped, "if you know of a good hotel, drive me to sixteen eighty-eight Third Avenue, and don't get so darned fresh."

By the time the taxi arrived at the Newman home the fresh air had somewhat revived Mollie and she was able to go upstairs unassisted. Her head was swirling round like a chip in a whirlpool. Without waking the Newmans, she managed to reach her room, staggered to the bed, and fell fast asleep.

## XXXIX

### MOLLIE MEETS DAVIS

WHEN she awoke the next afternoon, she was in bed and undressed. Mary had done this for her. Mollie's throat was parched with thirst and her head was threatening to split apart.

Through the ministrations of Mary, and aided by some hot soup, she soon felt much better. Mary asked no questions and acted as if nothing unusual had occurred. Mollie appreciated her kindness and did not volunteer any information. The incident between the two girls was closed. At the usual hour Mollie was dressed and ready to go to work. She tried hard to remember the events of the night before, but her brain was too muddled and everything was a jumble.

Davis and Rat Morgan, at a table, were waiting for her to come on for her first number. Davis had not taken much stock in Morgan's description, but he figured if she did come up to his description she would be well worth landing.

As Mollie entered the Palais Jardin, the detective was standing at the door. "Remember," he warned, as she entered, "no funny stuff." She ignored him; she was licked and she knew it, and somehow she didn't seem to care.

Mollie's arrest had proved to her how futile it was to try to fight the battle alone. She had lost interest in

## MOLLIE MEETS DAVIS

everything about her; her eyes had a dreamy expression in them, as if nothing mattered.

But there still remained two nights of freedom of the time allotted her by Donnelly. If she could only meet some one who would take up the cudgels in her defense, how gladly she would go with him, how gladly she would pay any price he asked.

In her dressing room she reviewed the situation and determined to go as far as she could with Donnelly, and then, if the worst came to the worst, she would kill herself. But she was afraid to die; she imagined that she and God were on the "outs."

"That's her, Mr. Davis," whispered Morgan, as Mollie appeared for her first number. "Judge for yourself."

Davis leaned forward in his chair, shifted the cigar in his mouth, and stared at the singer. Morgan was not looking at her; he was closely watching the face of Davis, and evidently was very much pleased at what he saw, because he smiled with satisfaction, which made his ratlike face the more repulsive, if that were possible.

Davis was greatly impressed. He watched Mollie as a cat, crouched on the sidewalk, watches a bird in the street. There was something about her that appealed to him; he couldn't decide what, she was so different from the types he had associated with. By comparison, Nannette faded into a hag.

Mollie, unaware of the gaze of the two men, commenced singing. The first note signed the death warrant of Nannette. "Rat," announced Davis, exultantly, "that girl's a bear, and I need her. If she has brains along with her looks, I ought to make a clean-up with her."

He took a card from his case and wrote on the back of it: "Arrange to see me right after the show. Something

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

vitaly important to you. Messenger will tell you who I am," and instructed Morgan to deliver it to Mollie.

Morgan hurried to the stage entrance, and, as he was about to enter, recognized the detective standing near the door and whistled to himself. After slipping a dollar into the palm of a ready hand, he was shown to Mollie's dressing room and delivered the note to her. Was this some champion, like those she had read of in storybooks, who, at the last moment, had come to her rescue? Well, nothing could be worse than Donnelly.

"Tell Mr. Davis I will be very glad to talk to him," she said, and then asked, "Where shall I meet him?"

"As soon as you finish your last number," replied Morgan, gazing inquiringly at her, "come around to the front and ask for Mr. Davis. He has a private booth."

Mollie, her nerves tingling, promised to do so.

A few minutes after Morgan had left her dressing room the door was opened rudely and the detective entered. "What did that bird want?" he demanded, giving a quick glance around.

Mollie, feeling very brave at the thought that there was a friend at hand, answered defiantly, "None of your business."

The detective advanced toward her in a threatening manner, but she stood her ground, unafraid.

"Look here," she snapped. "You're getting entirely too fresh. When I tell Donnelly how you've acted, I guess he'll attend to you."

The detective paused, stared at her a moment to see if he had heard aright, and then, like all bullies, took water. "Now, miss," he whined, "I wasn't tryin' to get fresh. Excuse me if I've offended you.

"Get out," commanded Mollie, pointing to the door.

The detective obeyed.

## MOLLIE MEETS DAVIS

During her last number she scanned the faces in the audience, but could not locate Morgan. She was disappointed. Had they forsaken her? As soon as she had finished she dressed hurriedly and went around to the front entrance, where Morgan was waiting for her. Before conducting her to Davis, he asked her name. Mollie told him.

"Mollie Eastman—Mollie Eastman," he repeated, under his breath, as if trying to penetrate the past, but the memory cells of his brain were clogged and refused to function.

"If you'll come with me, Miss Eastman," he said, "I'll show you Mr. Davis."

When Morgan had introduced Mollie to Davis, he sat in the next booth to theirs and watched. Was he mistaken? There, sitting at a table, was the detective he had seen at the door when he took the note to Miss Eastman. Was he being shadowed, or was the detective after Davis, or, better still, was Miss Eastman being covered? Why? He decided to shadow the detective and see what it was all about.

## XL

### "DREAMS"

DAVIS was very much taken with Mollie. After a few minutes' conversation he decided quickly and correctly the course he would have to pursue to gain her confidence. The "gentleman stunt" was the one to get results.

He invited her very politely to have some wine. Mollie was running a campaign, also, and she decided as quickly and correctly as he.

"Thank you, Mr. Davis," she declined just as politely, "but I never drink."

Her answer came as an agreeable surprise to him. Here was a girl who, undoubtedly, was clever, and, in addition, did not drink. This would be a great asset in his business. It meant she would always have her wits about her.

Davis was not there to give information; he was there to get it, so by degrees he learned the whole story of Mollie's troubles with Donnelly. It was a great relief to her to confide in some one.

When she had finished, Davis smiled to himself. This was a great piece of luck. Here was a chance to make an instant hit with her.

He parted the curtains of the booth and beckoned to Rat Morgan, who came quickly at his call. "Morgan," declared he, impressively, "Donnelly has framed up Miss Eastman. Phone him right away and have him come here. Tell him *I* want to see him."

## "DREAMS"

Morgan leaned over and whispered something in his ear. Davis glanced quickly in the direction of the detective and then touched Mollie on the arm.

"Is that fellow sitting over there at the table the one who framed you?" he whispered. Mollie nodded in reply, and he spoke to Morgan in a low voice. Mollie watched him with fear gnawing at her heart. Morgan crossed to the detective, whispered something to him, and pointed to the booth occupied by Mollie and Davis. Mollie trembled.

The detective hesitated, and Morgan again whispered to him; this time he rose hurriedly and came toward the booth. When he saw Davis he stepped back, paling slightly. Davis, in a peremptory voice, ordered him to enter, and then motioned for him to be seated. The detective sat down like a whipped cur. He knew who Davis was, and feared his power in the department.

Davis smiled at him reassuringly, and then, leaning so near that his breath blew in his face, he remarked, sneeringly: "So you pulled a frame-up on this kid here, did you? Pulled it for Donnelly, too. Clever stuff, but do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to send you up the river so far and for such a long time that when you return nobody 'll know you."

The detective turned white and commenced to whine, but Davis shut him up by blowing smoke in his face. "Donnelly will be here in a few minutes," he informed, "and then I'm going to hand it to both of you."

The officer of the law wilted in his chair.

"Don't mind this low-down cur, Miss Eastman," reassured Davis. "I'll spike his little game."

Mollie was almost petrified with amazement, intermingled with respect and gratitude for Davis. Here was a man who certainly knew how to play his cards well.



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

It would be an easy matter for him to capture her, because in her heart she knew he was the champion she was looking for.

In a few minutes Morgan returned. "Donnelly's out there," he announced. "Shall I send him in?" Davis answered in the affirmative and the detective shifted uneasily.

Molly, closely observed by Davis, was clasping and unclasping her hands nervously.

"Don't be afraid," he consoled. "Just leave that bird to me and watch him take water."

Donnelly entered with a very pompous air, but, on seeing Mollie and the detective with Davis, he fidgeted with his hat.

"Sit down, Donnelly," commanded Davis. "I want to talk to you."

Donnelly obeyed like a sulky schoolboy. Davis looked from him to Mollie and *winked*. She could have kissed him for that wink. It put her at ease immediately.

"Up to your old tricks again, Donnelly?" inquired Davis, in a bantering tone. "Now listen. I haven't much time to waste on you, because this lady and myself wish to spend a pleasant little evening alone, but I just want to tell you that I'm next to this frame-up deal and that I'm going to send you up the river with that gumshoe sitting next to you. And what's more, Donnelly, the frame-up isn't going to be the only charge. You know what I mean."

Donnelly turned pale and wet his lips with his tongue. "For God's sake, Roulette Jake," he beseeched, in a tremulous voice. "For God's sake, don't."

"Go ahead and whimper," sneered Davis, disgustedly. "It's musical. You gave Miss Eastman three days to make up her mind, didn't you?"

## "DREAMS"

Donnelly was too far gone to answer.

"Well, I'm going to give you the same time. Three days from to-day you come to my place, both of you, and then I'll tell you what I'm going to do about it. Now get out, because I'm busy."

They rose and slunk from the booth.

"Miss Eastman," he purred, clasping Mollie's hand in his and drawing her gently to him, "did I handle them to your taste?"

"I think you are simply wonderful!" she whispered, and meant it.

Her answer captivated Davis. He was beginning to like this sweet girl with the dreamy eyes.

"May I call you 'Dreams'?" he asked, suddenly, squeezing her hands lovingly. "And will you call me Jack?"

"Yes, *Jack*," replied Mollie, under her breath.

He put his arms around her and drew her to him until her head rested on his shoulder. She did not require much persuading. At last she had found some one who was going to look after her. Had Davis known it, then and there was his chance to make her love him for life. But he shifted his position to light a cigar and his chance was gone forever.

They had talked for about an hour when Mollie rose to go. Davis asked to take her home, but she was ashamed of her Third Avenue address, and refused gently but firmly. She promised to meet him the next night.

## XLI

### PLANTING THE SEED

**D**AVIS had fascinated Mollie completely. She didn't care who he was nor what he was. It was enough for her that he had stepped into the breach and saved her from Donnelly. It was the first time in her life she had met such a masterful man. To her it seemed that all he had to do was to hold up a finger and the world would stop revolving. And, in addition to all this, he liked her, his actions had plainly shown it. Why should he go out of his way to befriend a girl unless he was interested. In her heart she vowed that if it were possible she would make him more than just interested. He was too valuable and powerful an ally to lose. She argued that, with his power and her talents a combination could be formed which would sweep all obstacles easily from the pathway of her success. Mollie did not love Davis, and probably never would, but she admired and respected him.

Upon arriving home, she woke Mary and they had a long talk. Mollie did not confide in Mary, but she felt that she had to have some one to talk to. It seemed to her that she had entered a new world. Her troubles had disappeared like magic, and Davis was the magician.

Although not knowing the details, Mary surmised something had happened which would be the turning point in Mollie's career, and she prayed for her success.

The next day Mollie kept up a buzz of conversation in

## PLANTING THE SEED

the Newman flat and busied herself with her best dress. She was going to show Davis that she knew how to dress and that she was fitted to walk on the same plane with him. Every hour increased her curiosity. Who was he? What was he? Perhaps some high city official? Or, better still, some powerful Wall Street financial king? Or maybe a great actor, or a producer? Her heart beat excitedly at her last guess. Wouldn't it be wonderful if he should star her in a Broadway play?

In this frame of mind she arrived at her dressing room.

The two chorus girls who had lied about her stealing were waiting for her. They were in their street clothes and were very nervous. One, braver or more brazen than her mate, touched Mollie on the arm.

"We know we're in wrong, but what good will it do you if we are sent up the river? Mr. Davis told us it was up to you whether we got it or not, so I—"

"You both should be in jail," interrupted Mollie, too happy to even think of revenge, "but it's nothing to me. I just don't want to see or hear from you again. For my part, you are free, so don't bother me."

The two girls were very profuse in their thanks, but she slammed the door in their faces. As the door closed the detective, who was waiting for them, stepped from a corner and accosted them.

"You heard what she said, so clear out; but if I had my way, it would be up the river for you both, tryin' to frame a nice lady like Miss Eastman."

The girls walked down the hall angrily, talking to each other. "The nerve of that bull pullin' that stuff, when he was the guy that planned the whole thing."

"I told you not to go into it, didn't I?" wailed the smaller of the two. "Now we're both out of a job, and we get no money for what we did do."

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

While Mollie was singing she looked for Davis, but he was missing. She felt keenly disappointed. Perhaps he would be in later, but he did not appear. Mollie was heartbroken, but when she arrived at her dressing room Morgan was waiting for her. Mollie greeted him eagerly.

"Miss Eastman," he inquired, after returning her greeting, "don't you remember me?"

Mollie, in surprise, gazed at him fixedly. Somehow his face did look familiar, but she could not place him.

"It doesn't matter," returned Morgan, promptly, relieving her embarrassment. "Guess I must have been mistaken."

Mollie was addling her brain, trying to remember where she had seen his face, but gave it up as hopeless.

"Mr. Davis sent me around with the car for you," said Morgan, interrupting her thoughts. "He says to wear that evening dress you wore in your first song, because he likes it. I'll wait outside while you change."

Mollie's heart was singing. She was so excited she could hardly get into her clothes. He had even noticed her dress, and he *liked* it, and he *wanted* her to wear it again.

Morgan assisted her into a luxurious limousine, and she sighed with content as she sank back on the soft cushions. She didn't know where she was going and she didn't care, just so Davis was at the other end of the trip. Morgan was silent during the ride; he had received his instructions.

At the gambling establishment Mollie was greeted warmly by Davis, who was waiting to conduct her on a tour of inspection. She was impressed greatly by the people crowding around the green tables.

Davis asked her if she felt lucky.

"Yes, I do," she answered, not knowing what else to reply.

## PLANTING THE SEED

"Then take this five-dollar bill and play it," he replied. "Let's go over to that table where there's nobody around."

Mollie agreed, the excitement of the place entering her veins.

Davis walked up to the table and, unseen by Mollie, winked at the croupier. He then told her to place the five dollars on any square she thought was lucky. Trembling with excitement, she laid the bill on a square, but, changing her mind quickly, picked it up and put it on another one. She won. Davis told her to bet it all next time. She did so and won, and then kept on winning. Her face was flushed and her eyes were like fire as she watched breathlessly the little silver ball swirling madly in the revolving bowl. Then it settled, and she had won again.

Davis stood by with a cynical smile; he was so enjoying himself, but his enjoyment was the sweeter because it was mixed with business. When Mollie had amassed a large pile of bills, he whispered to her: "Listen, Dreams. There's always a time to quit, and that time is when you are ahead."

"This money doesn't all belong to me," cried she, incredulously. "Does it?"

He laughingly assured her it did. Quite a crowd had gathered around the table, attracted by her exclamations of joy as she won. They commenced playing, but "luck" had changed, and they lost steadily.

Davis led Mollie into an anteroom and, sitting on a couch, he counted the money for her. She had won over five hundred dollars. Both her cheeks were burning as she gasped, in awe. It was more money than she had ever seen at one time, and all—yes, every dollar of it—belonged to her!

She insisted that Davis accept half, arguing that it had

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

been his suggestion to play and that it was also his money with which she had played, but he refused smilingly, claiming the money was won by her good judgment alone.

Mollie, very much flattered, looked up into his face with a smile. Suddenly, bending over, he kissed her lightly on the lips. She returned the kiss and then, in great confusion, rose hurriedly, her face scarlet. Davis wisely gave her time to recover from her embarrassment, then conducted her around his establishment and introduced her to several of the guests. She recognized many faces from the audiences of the Palais Jardin, and everyone she met treated her as if she were a queen, and she was soon the center of attraction. At last she had found her proper niche in life, and it was all due to Davis, her champion, her hero.

Roulette Jack was religiously following a prearranged and carefully thought out campaign with Mollie. He reasoned that she would be of great value to him in attracting new sheep to the shearing, and right then he needed sheep and needed them badly. After about an hour had elapsed he suggested she had better let him send her home, giving as an excuse that she would be tired out. He did not wish her to taste too much for the first time. Mollie hated to go, but she refrained from saying so.

Davis believed in starting right. Even in this instance he could not refrain from showing her that above everything else he was master, and if he suggested home, home it was.

"I will not be able to see you to-morrow night," he whispered, as he helped her on with her wraps, "but why not ask some of your friends at the Palais Jardin to bring you here and try their luck. There's a fellow named Curtis—perhaps you know him? He might like to escort you."

## PLANTING THE SEED

Mollie wondered how he knew about Curtis, but, nevertheless, it was a good suggestion, because she knew Curtis would be only too glad to take her anywhere she wanted to go, and she did want to come back and try her luck again—to be near Davis. Promising to return the next evening with Curtis, she entered the waiting limousine.

As the door closed behind her, Davis smiled with satisfaction at the successful working of his plan. He had started her down the right hill, and as she gained momentum in her descent he reasoned that an avalanche would follow in her wake.

Let them win the first time, and there is nothing that can keep them away. If she could induce Curtis to play, he saw a big haul in front of him, because Curtis was assistant paying teller in one of the largest banks in Wall Street, and his father was president of the same institution. That was what appealed to Davis; the father, being president, would do anything to cover his son's losses, or *thefts*, but Davis, despite his cunning and foresight, did not know the elder Curtis, or he would not have been so sure of himself.

Curtis was in the audience the next night, and sent a note to Mollie, asking if she would meet him after the show. She assented, gladly, inwardly thanking the goddess of chance for being so kind.

Curtis was very much surprised when she asked to be taken to a gambling establishment, and especially to one which had such an unsavory reputation, but he did not care; he would not gamble. Nothing mattered to him then but Mollie. Grace was forgotten.

Mollie could hardly wait until they arrived at the gambling house. Upon entering, she looked around hopefully—perhaps Davis would be there, after all; but he was nowhere in sight.



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

She conducted Curtis to the table at which she had won the night previously. The same croupier was there, but he did not recognize her openly. He also had received his instructions. Mollie began playing, and won. Then "luck" went against her, or perhaps it was a certain pressure of the croupier's foot against a device hidden under the carpet which made her winnings of the night before decrease slowly but surely. She was becoming very nervous; she bit her lips, and her hands trembled as she placed bill after bill on the table, only to see it add to the pile in front of the croupier.

Finally the five hundred she had won with Davis was lost, including twenty dollars of her own. Curtis had not played, but, like one fascinated, was watching Mollie, and the croupier, like a hawk hovering over its prey, was watching him closely, ready to swoop down.

"Jim," pleaded Mollie, in a voice quavering from excitement, "my luck's against me. Why don't you try and see what you can do?"

He hesitated; it was against the rules of the bank to gamble, but Mollie was more to him than all the banks in the world, and rules were only made to be broken. The player next to Mollie commenced to win, and she tugged impatiently at Curtis's sleeve to hurry. Smiling reassuringly at her, he reached for his wallet and proudly extracted a fifty-dollar bill. He was going to make an impression. He played it on the red and lost. Nonchalantly extracting a hundred-dollar bill, he threw it carelessly on a square in front of him. Mollie placed a five-dollar bill beside it. They won. They stuck to the game with varying luck until Curtis looked at his watch. It was a quarter to six, and he had to be at the bank at eight-thirty. Mollie would not believe him when he told her the time; she had to look at his watch, and

## PLANTING THE SEED

then could scarcely credit her eyes. It had seemed like an hour to her. The rest of the room was nearly deserted and daylight was showing through an open window at the end of the room.

Mollie was ahead fifty dollars, and Curtis about seventy. The fire of gambling in his veins, he suggested they play their winnings three times consecutively, and, if they won, to quit and then divide. She agreed. They won. The croupier smiled as he removed his foot from a certain spot on the carpet.

Curtis helped Mollie into a taxi and asked to be excused from taking her home, stating that he had to go uptown and change his clothes before going to the bank. The reaction had set in and she was too sleepy to say anything, nor did she resist when Curtis drew her to him and kissed her twice on the mouth.

Davis, who was watching them from a front window on the third floor, muttered to himself, as Curtis kissed her: "That kiss 'll cost you just ten thousand dollars. But, believe me, I don't blame you; it's worth the money."

When Mollie arrived home she dumped the crumpled bills on the bed and tried sleepily to count them. Three times arriving at a different total, she gave up and crawled into bed. The next afternoon she again counted her money and found that she had won over eight hundred dollars. She did not tell Mary of her good luck because she was ashamed to admit she had won the money gambling.

Curtis, in his apartment, counted his winnings, and whistled when he realized how much he had won. This certainly beat working in the bank all hollow. *The seed had been planted.*

## XLII

### GRATITUDE

DAVIS had studied Mollie carefully, and had reached the conclusion that if he asked her to live with him in his apartment the whole game would be off. Well, the only thing to do was to ask her to marry him. Not that he intended to marry her; not he. But, if necessary, it was very simple to have a mock marriage, and then, when she ceased being useful, or he tired of her, it would be easy to get rid of her and he would not be inconvenienced by matrimonial ties.

There was still another obstacle in his path to be reckoned with—Nannette. He couldn't buy her off, and, anyway, he didn't want to try that method; it was bad business. He could have her croaked, but it was too dangerous. There was one way left; he could frame her; but this would only put her out of the way for two or three years, or, at the most, five, and sooner or later she would find it out, and he had no desire to face her when she returned from "up the river," because Nannette could not be called an angel when she had it in for some one.

After careful consideration, he determined the latter method, even though inconvenient, would be the best. When Davis made up his mind to a course of action he lost no time in getting started.

He promptly called her on the telephone. Nannette

## GRATITUDE

was overjoyed to hear his voice on the wire, because it had been three days since she had heard from him and she was beginning to feel jealous. After several minutes' conversation, telling her how busy he had been and how sorry he was that he had been unable to see her, he got down to the business in hand.

"Listen, Nan dear. I'm afraid I'm in bad. The new commissioner's got the goods on me and I'm being shadowed. I just got a tip from headquarters to skip out of town for a couple of weeks. It would look suspicious for the two of us to go, so I am going to ask you to do me a favor. Will you?"

"Of course I will, Jack dear," consoled Nannette. "You know I would do anything for you, even go to jail if you said so."

Davis smiled at the irony of her last remark. "I want to warn you to look out, because I think they're after you, too. Now be a good girl while I'm gone. I'm leaving on the five-o'clock train, and have a lot to do before I go."

Nannette insisted that he kiss her over the wire, so, with a sneering smile, he placed his lips close to the transmitter and kissed her good-by. An answering kiss came back, and he hung up. Again lifting the receiver, he got another number, and Donnelly's voice answered.

"Donnelly," he commanded, in reply, "this is Davis. You and that gumshoe come up here right away, and don't lose any time about it."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Davis," answered Donnelly. "He is right here with me. We were waiting for you to call. We'll be right up."

Davis hurried to the safe and got out a paper tied with red tape. It was the confession of a girl named Dora, who had committed suicide years before. A friendly detec-

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

tive had found it in her room, and, after reading it, reached the conclusion that it would be more valuable to Davis than to the law. He was right. Davis paid him five hundred dollars and placed it among his papers in a drawer marked "Useful." He was gambling on the future.

The light on his table flashed, and in a few minutes Donnelly and the detective entered. They had talked things over previously and had decided there was no immediate danger from Davis, because, they reasoned, if he had intended to send them up the river he would not have given them three days' grace. They argued that he never did anyone a favor, and that they would have to pay for his clemency. They were correct in their surmises.

Donnelly sat down, while the detective, not quite so much at ease, waited until Davis ordered him to be seated. Davis tapped the table idly with the confession and stared at Donnelly with a piercing gaze. Donnelly shifted uncomfortably.

"This paper I have in my hand, Donnelly, is the confession of a girl named Dora," reflected Davis. "I think she used to work at your place years ago. I happened to be intimate, *very intimate*, with her for a short time, and, as *you* know, Dora had a pretty loose tongue and would talk, and sometimes she put her thoughts on paper; and, in addition, Dora was *clever*. The only fool thing she ever did was to end her life. Some say she committed suicide, while others intimate she was murdered."

Donnelly turned pale at the last sentence. He really had not murdered Dora, but there was enough circumstantial evidence which, if brought to light, would put him behind the bars, and he realized it. Davis had long before told him of the confession found in her room, and had used his knowledge as a club over him.

## GRATITUDE

Challenging him to answer, Davis pierced him with his gaze. "All right," he faltered, after wetting his dry lips nervously with his tongue; "don't rub it in. What do you want? If I can do it, I will."

Seemingly ignoring Donnelly's surrender, Davis turned to the detective. "I had a talk with Inspector Mulvaney yesterday," he lied, "and reminded him of the time you were in that jam over the Chink on Second Avenue, who was shot because he resisted arrest. Remember it? Mulvaney says the Chink had three thousand dollars hidden in his laundry. But the money was never found. I think you did the shooting and Mulvaney had you transferred to the Bronx. You weren't a plain-clothes man then; just an ordinary cop."

The detective lowered his eyes and squirmed in his chair, but did not reply. This Davis certainly was a wizard; no wonder everyone on the "Force" was afraid of him.

Davis shifted his gaze from the detective and addressed Donnelly. "I want Nannette framed, and I want her framed right, so she'll go up for five years, and, so help me God! if you two fall down you'll each do five years to make up for it. And you know I never throw a bluff."

Donnelly was startled when he heard Nannette's name. He was afraid of her. She was a pretty clever bird, and he told Davis so.

"Of course she's clever," confessed he, "but here's a tip. One of her johns gave her a thousand dollars to get a ring at Thompson's, in Maiden Lane. She's going down there to-morrow to buy it. Have Diamond Nell or Spanish Lizzie shadow her. I'll fix it at headquarters so they'll be allowed to cross the 'dead line.' Have them lift something valuable in the store and plant it on Nannette. Get a couple of women for witnesses, ones you can

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

rely on. Then you," addressing the detective, "make the pinch, but, before you do, have the two witnesses come up to you and say they saw Nannette lift the stuff. Nannette won't make a holler, she's too wise for that, and will guess it's a frame-up. The first thing she'll try to do is to get in touch with me. Then it's up to you and the rest to *convince* her that I had to pull out *to-night* because they had the goods on me in that Ferguson deal."

The detective and Donnelly were listening attentively.

"But there's one thing you must not slip up on," warned Davis. "Give Diamond Nell or Spanish Lizzie, whichever you use, plenty of time to make a getaway before you make the pinch, because I don't want one of those 'specials' to get his lamps on her. He might recognize her and it would cause trouble. Tell her to blow the town until Nannette is sentenced and sent up. I'll see there's no time lost in getting it rushed."

Donnelly and the detective rose. It was risky business, framing Nannette, but not so risky as refusing. "What do you want me to do in it?" inquired Donnelly, hoping that Davis would answer in the negative.

"I want you," snarled Davis, with a sour smile, "before you leave this apartment, to draw up, in your own handwriting, full instructions, which, if the thing fails, will throw the entire blame on you. This will give you an incentive to personally see that the frame-up comes through successfully."

Both Donnelly and the detective opened their eyes in admiration. No wonder this man was on top and had the department jumping sideways. Davis ordered the detective to wait downstairs until Donnelly joined him.

When he had gone, Davis handed Donnelly some paper and told him to get busy. Donnelly reached for a pen on the desk, but Davis, with a crafty smile, suggested he

## GRATITUDE

use his fountain-pen. He wanted the document, if necessary, to stand the test on the witness stand, and was trying to cover all the points. "Have you got a notebook?" he asked, after a minute's thought. Donnelly took one from his pocket. "Better tear out a few leaves and use them," continued Davis, with a wink; "it will seem more homelike to have everything quite proper."

Donnelly wrote as Davis dictated, and an hour had passed before he met the detective, who was nervously waiting for him.

The next morning the telephone bell rang, and Davis was on the point of answering it, but, suddenly changing his mind, he pressed the button for Peters. Davis told him to answer the phone, and, if it was Nannette, to say, "Mr. Davis left town suddenly about five o'clock last night." It *was* Nannette. Davis congratulated himself on his foresight as he thought of his narrow escape.

All day he remained in his apartment and kept Peters with him to answer the telephone. He was providing against the possibility of having Nannette use some one else to call him. He knew she was clever, but he also knew that he was more so.

That evening the paper was brought to him and he read a two-column head on the front page:

"One-time popular Broadway dancer arrested for theft of jewels."

He perused the account eagerly. The frame-up had worked perfectly. But Davis, as smart as he was, had forgotten that he had an enemy in the judge and that the judge had been in love with Nannette for years.



## XLIII

### THE PRICE OF A KISS

**T**HAT night Mollie and Curtis again visited the gambling house, but this time "luck" worked differently. Curtis, when he played a number alone, invariably lost. But if he played with Mollie he won. It did not take him long to get on to this fact, and they both played together. The croupier was in a quandary. He had received instructions from Davis, but this was a combination that even he had overlooked. The croupier pressed a button and another croupier came to his relief. He immediately reported the situation to Davis, who, after a few seconds' thought, replied:

"All right. Take them both. When Curtis goes broke pass him another stack of chips and send for me. They don't play with money, do they?"

"No, sir. Not since you told me to inform them it was the rule of the house to use chips."

"Hurry back and get on the job," commanded Davis, impatiently.

The croupier returned to his brace game, and, following instructions, Curtis and Mollie soon were down to their last dollar. The croupier pressed a button and it was not long before Davis sauntered up to the table and seemed very much surprised to see Mollie. She was delighted, and introduced him to Curtis. Curtis was flushed and nervous; already he had lost five hundred

## THE PRICE OF A KISS

dollars which did not belong to him, and he must win it back.

Davis, excusing himself to Mollie, drew Curtis to one side. "Listen, old man. My manager, Mr. Peters, informed me that you've had a little hard luck. Well, don't let that worry you; luck never stays the same; it's bound to turn. If you're a trifle short, I can let you have some money on an I O U."

Curtis accepted the offer thankfully. Just a little luck and he could win back what he had lost, and no one would be the wiser. Davis ushered him into a side room and insisted he take five thousand. Curtis did not want so much, but reasoned it would make no difference, because after the evening was over he could easily return the amount to Davis. And the temptation was too great. Anyway, a regular fellow like Davis would never press a matter of this kind, so he accepted the money with many thanks. Davis let him get to the door, and then, coughing slightly, he called after him:

"Of course, Curtis" (he had dropped the Mister because Curtis owed him money), "just as a matter of form, if you'll sign this I O U, it will help Peters keep his accounts straight."

Curtis returned and signed the paper hurriedly without reading it. Ordinarily, he never would have done such a thing, but now it was different, and he did not dare to risk an insult to Mr. Davis, who had been so kind to him, by reading an I O U. As Curtis returned to the gambling table, Davis picked up the I O U, and it changed into a thirty days' note for five thousand dollars at 6-per-cent interest.

While Curtis was away Mollie had been lucky and had won a hundred dollars. Davis returned to her side and watched her play. His elbow was touching her arm and

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

the touch was pleasant, and she edged closer to him. He was not slow to follow up his advantage, because he gave her arm a sly squeeze, upon which she glanced at him and smiled.

Curtis promptly commenced plunging, and Mollie placed her money with his. They lost steadily. Mollie soon went broke, but Curtis kept buying stack after stack, and divided with her. In about an hour he had lost his last stack of chips and the five thousand was gone.

This time Davis did not offer to come to his assistance with more money. He was waiting for Curtis to ask.

"Could I see you a minute, Mr. Davis?" he asked, with a sickly smile.

"Certainly," beamed Davis. "Come this way."

Mollie stared after them with wondering eyes. What were these conferences they were having? She never dreamed that Curtis was borrowing money from Davis.

When they entered the "office" Davis crossed to the desk and secured another five thousand from Peters, which he turned over to Curtis, who signed another note and, thanking Davis, hurried back to get even.

This time he threw caution to the winds and staked his money a stack at a time. Mollie was watching his play breathlessly, her eyes glued to that little silver ball whirling and whirling around.

Every time Curtis lost she ejaculated a weak, "Oh!" and gazed at him in sympathy. Davis was enjoying himself thoroughly; twice he winked at the croupier, and Curtis won back a couple of thousand. Davis was playing with him as a cat plays with a mouse. Finally, tiring of the game, he signaled to the croupier, and Curtis was broke again. It took him a few seconds to realize that he had lost his ten thousand dollars; then, appalled by his

## THE PRICE OF A KISS

loss, he bit his lips until the blood came, and turned to Davis appealingly.

"Not to-night, Curtis," returned Davis, in answer to his appeal. "Luck's against you. Come around to-morrow and try it again. There's no use forcing the game; you'll only go deeper in the hole."

The desperate youth tried hard to smile, but made a dismal failure of it. He staggered to the coat room, and, in a broken voice, mumbled to Mollie: "I don't think I feel very well. Shall I see you to-morrow? I know Mr. Davis will be glad to take you home."

Mollie answered in the affirmative, and squeezed his hand sympathetically as she said good night to him.

Davis invited her to have supper with him at an all-night restaurant, and, after eating, escorted her "home" in his car. Mollie, in desperation, had given him a number of an apartment where one of the principals in the Palais Jardin lived.

After she had kissed him good night she stood in the hallway until his car had left. Then, going to Broadway, she hailed a taxi to take her to her right address on Third Avenue. A limousine followed her. As her taxi drew away from the Third Avenue address, Davis, in the limousine, made a note of the number. Mollie hadn't realized as yet that it was pretty hard to put anything over on him. She, in giving the other address, where her friend lived, had not known that Nannette, the "one-time popular Broadway dancer," lived there. Davis had not suspected Mollie was trying to double cross him about the address; he guessed correctly that she had been ashamed to let him know that she lived on Third Avenue.

Before retiring, he tried the combination of his safe carefully. He did not forget that he had an ex-convict,

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Rat Morgan, in his employ, and that at one time Peters had been *nearly* arrested for safe blowing.

After locking the doors to his quarters, he turned out the reading lamp beside the bed and pulled the covers over him. "Ten thousand for a kiss isn't bad," he muttered, sleepily, "but, come to think of it, he kissed her twice. Well, I said the price for a kiss was ten, so I guess I'll get another out of him so as not to break my word."

But Curtis was not sleeping; he was fighting a battle which many men have fought and few have won. Should he face the music or should he take a chance to "borrow" from the bank until he made a winning that would settle his debts and put him back on "Easy Street"? He decided to "trust to luck," and joined the numberless throng who are always following the road to "Easy Street," only to find, when it is too late, that it ends in a blind alley with "Ruin" painted on the bricks.

## XLIV

### THE SURRENDER

**A** WEEK passed and Curtis had not visited the gambling hall, but this did not worry Davis. He had seen many men enter his doors prosperous and respectable. Then, one by one, he had singled them out for his victims, until now nearly all of them were discredited wrecks beached on the shores of Broadway. Some of them were "doing time," while a few had killed themselves. One or two had escaped, but they were the exceptions to the rule. In the matter of Curtis, he knew the signs. Curtis was having a futile struggle with himself to go "straight." This would last perhaps a week, or, if he was stronger willed than the average, he might lengthen it into ten days or maybe a little longer, but the result would be the same. He would be back to try his luck again. He would lose and sign "I O U's" until Davis was ready to spring the trap.

The only thing Davis was uncertain of was how much "old man" Curtis would stand for. Perhaps thirty thousand would be a safe limit, or, if he didn't want to play the "old man," why not get Curtis in so deep that perhaps with his co-operation Peters and Morgan could arrange for a wholesale robbery of the bank. This was the better plan. He would follow it.

Curtis, in his fight, had not written to Mollie or called her on the telephone. Instead, he had tried the company

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

of Grace to see if her influence would help him to break the spell which Broadway and its haunts had cast over him. But Grace had lost her power and, in his eyes, she was out of the running; she was far too simple. She had no *big* ideas and would never make a wife for a man who had ambition to accomplish great things.

Davis, during the absence of Curtis, decided he would bring his relations with Mollie to an immediate issue. Accordingly, he was very attentive to her and spent most of his time in her company, although he was careful not to give her the impression that he was "running after" her.

She realized gradually that a word from him was law. She did not even question the right or wrong of it. It was a new sensation—and a mighty pleasant one, too—to have some one to lean on, some one who did the worrying and thinking for her. She trusted him implicitly and longed for his company, but still she did not love him.

Many an hour she had spent with herself, trying to fathom why she did not love him. There was something missing between them; somewhere the circuit was broken, but, being happy, she was satisfied as things were.

One night, right after the show, Davis called for her and took her straight to his apartment. He made no apologies for doing so, but did it in such a matter-of-fact way that she neither resented it nor was surprised. Davis had arranged a supper for two, and Mollie enjoyed it immensely.

When the dishes had been cleared away Davis led her to a sofa in front of the fireplace in which gas logs were burning. He sat beside her and lighted a cigar. "Dreams," he said, as if reciting some item in the day's news. "I have decided that we will get married this week."

Mollie gasped.

## THE SURRENDER

"I've arranged everything," continued he, pretending not to notice her astonishment; "this will be our home for the present, so that I can keep in direct touch with my business. Of course, the ceremony part is immaterial; it can take place any time. Now that you understand me, you'd better take off your things and *make yourself at home.*"

Mollie was speechless. She had never listened to anything quite so audacious in her life. What power had this man over her? She did not even feel resentment at his words. Somehow they appeared quite right and rational.

"Dreams," resumed Davis, without a caress in his voice, as if he were discussing a business deal, "you and I understand each other, don't we?"

She bowed her head in assent.

"Well, then, everything's settled, isn't it?"

Mollie paused; she was sparring for time; her brain refused to work, but her hand stole over and rested on his arm. She had surrendered. Davis then played his master stroke; *he kissed her on the forehead.* It sealed her fate.

He rose and left the room. He was wise enough to give her a chance to think it out by herself. As Mollie gazed into the fire, Mrs. Henderson's smiling face seemed to be dancing in the blue gas flames of the logs, then her mother's face appeared. They were both smiling, but they seemed to be beckoning to her to follow them, and to hurry, as if some impending danger were immediately behind her.

The two faces faded and she saw little red devils, carrying forked guidons, scampering along the logs. There were words inscribed on the guidons, but she could not read them. Mollie sat thus for about twenty minutes,



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

staring vacantly into the fire. Then, burying her face in her hands, she closed her eyes and addressed God.

"I've insulted you, God, but I'll take it all back. You *are* on the square, after all, and I thank you for what you have done."

Outside a star shot from the sky, a blazing trail in its wake, which melted quickly into darkness. Greatly relieved, she inspected her new home curiously. How she could improve the place with a few touches, and Jack wouldn't know his rooms. If Mollie had only known that the room, and the others, had received countless "touches" from many feminine hands, she would not have felt so serene.

Davis, who had been observing her closely through a crack in the door, entered and, gathering her in his arms, imprinted a long, lingering kiss on her lips. Mollie wilted in his arms, but did not return his kiss. He noticed her failure to respond, but made no comment. As yet he didn't care if kisses were returned or not; this was simply business with him.

He released Mollie, who, breathing hard, went to the mirror and arranged her hair. Davis followed her with a cynical smile, and then played another trump card.

"Dreams," he purred, kissing her on the hair, "let's go and look *our* place over. You know we are partners now." Then, backing away, he held out his hands to her. She thrilled all over as she ran to him. He led her down the stairs and they entered the large saloon.

The attendants and croupiers gazed at Mollie with new interest. They sensed that something was in the air, and realized instinctively that Mollie's favor would mean much to them. As Davis entered with Mollie, old, bald-headed Peters murmured to himself, "The queen is dead, long live the queen," and then bowed very, very low to her.

## THE SURRENDER

She was floating in the clouds; this respect and homage were wonderful. And to think that she was mistress of this glorious place!

It did not appeal to her as a gambling hell, where suicides were made and lives ruined. She did not see the many desolate homes in its path, nor the heartbroken mothers, nor the weeping wives, nor the sad-eyed children. All she saw was the glittering chandeliers, the gold-leaf decorations, and the beautiful paintings on the walls. To her it was Paradise.

Now that she was mistress, the gambling fever died in her veins. Davis had informed her laughingly that she would only be winning their own money. She laughed merrily in reply. It was worth any price, this being a queen.

Before going upstairs to their apartment, Mollie drew Davis into one of the anterooms. "Jack, will you promise to marry me *sure* next week?" she queried, in an awed whisper.

Her whole soul was in her eyes as she gazed at him. He was not new to that look; he had expected it and had been under its fire many times before, even though it is a look that a woman can give but once in her life.

"Dreams, if it were not too late," he lied, "I would marry you to-night."

"Jack, answer my question," she insisted, clasping his face in her hands and gazing deep into his eyes.

"Dreams," he promised, solemnly, returning her gaze, "*I will marry you next week.*"

Mollie thought deeply, and then whispered, "I trust you, Jack." She then walked to the door, turned, and held out her hands to him. "I am ready when you are."

Two souls in heaven bowed their heads—they had lost.

## XLV

### THE AWAKENING

**I**N a cell in the Tombs, Nannette, with eyes red from crying, was scribbling a note to her darling Jack, warning him of his danger and telling him they had been trying to pump her about him, but that she was loyal and would stick to the end, even if she had to do five years. She sent him her undying love and asked him to be true to her while she was imprisoned. She gave the note to one whom she could trust.

Late that night Davis was disturbed by the messenger delivering her message. Mollie asked him what it was about. "Just a telegram from a person leaving town," he grinned, "saying good-by to me."

Weeks passed and Mollie was still unmarried. But it did not seem so important in her eyes as it once had. She did not bother Jack about it; he was too busy, and appeared so dreadfully worried over something. Any time would do.

Curtis had been a frequent visitor at the gambling house, and Davis, true to his word, had made the second kiss cost him another ten thousand. He now owed over twenty-five thousand dollars, and Davis decided that it was about time he put the "screws" on him.

Mollie had retained her engagement at the Palais Jardin, because Davis had requested her to, telling her he was not at all jealous and that she should mix and bring friends with her, because it helped the business. Mollie, although

## THE AWAKENING

a little surprised and a trifle hurt, carried out his instructions religiously.

But she could not understand the change in Curtis; he avoided her constantly. His eyes were haggard and he looked as if he were wasting away from some insidious malady.

Mollie soon became a general favorite on Broadway, and turned down many offers of marriage, and otherwise, from wealthy men.

Finally Davis came to the conclusion it would be better for Mollie to cancel her engagement at the Palais Jardin; he wanted to use her on bigger game. She did not question him, but gave a week's notice. Mr. Murphy offered to double her salary, but she thanked him and declined, although she did not wish to leave; but Jack wanted it, and she knew no other course than to obey.

Her engagement ended on a Saturday night. After saying good-by to the rest of the performers she left by the stage entrance, where her limousine was waiting for her. As she stepped on to the sidewalk, Pete Short, now a horrible wreck of humanity, leered into her face and held out a trembling palm for alms. Mollie shuddered, but turned as she opened her bag so as to get the light from a bulb over the stage door. Pete Short caught a glimpse of her face and paled through his grime and dirt. Extracting a five-dollar bill from her bag, she handed it to him. Without thanking her, the derelict eagerly clutched the money. "What is your name?" he asked, in a husky voice.

"Mollie Eastman," answered Mollie, in surprise. "Why?"

Pete started to shuffle away without answering, but turned and stared back at her. "Do you work here?" he inquired, trembling visibly.

"Yes, I work here," returned Mollie, very much interested. "What's the—"

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

A blue-coated arm rested on Pete's shoulder and jerked him violently backward. "This fellow's an old offender," vouchsafed a policeman. "I've pinched him twice for panhandling."

Mollie coaxed the officer to let him go, but he resented her interference. "Now mind your own business, miss," he replied, insolently, "and don't be interfering with the execution of the law. This old bird's a faker; he's trying to put something over on you."

With that he roughly dragged Pete Short to a police box on the corner.

Mollie entered her limousine and soon forgot the incident.

Arriving at her "home," she decided she would stop in the saloon and take a look around. As she entered the main room she bumped into Jim Curtis. "Why, hello, Jim!" she greeted, cordially, proffering her hand. "It's been so long since I've seen you."

Curtis peered at her with hollow eyes, and disregarded the outstretched hand. "Even a violet loses its sweetness and fragrance when worn in the buttonhole of a *roué*," he muttered, as he brushed by her.

His words went through her like a knife. It had been the first unkind thing that Curtis had ever said to her. She turned as if to run after him, but, thinking better of it, she tossed her head haughtily and went upstairs.

Davis had assigned Rat Morgan to the roulette game at which Curtis generally played, and had instructed him to get on friendly terms with him. He had decided that a robbery of the bank, engineered by Curtis, would net him far more than just a mere collection, plus 6 per cent, of what was owed him.

Mollie's encounter with Curtis had upset her. Kissing Davis, she sat on his lap and asked him what was the matter with Curtis, not mentioning her tilt with him.

## THE AWAKENING

Davis knew that sooner or later she would learn the truth, and it was a rule of his that no one should catch him in a lie, if he could help it. He realized that even servants, after finding that the master had lied, from then on ceased to be servants. It gave them exaggerated opinions of their own importance to know that the one they looked up to had been compelled to lie to them.

"Curtis has lost thousands of dollars," he answered, kissing her on the cheek, "and I guess he's unable to pay, and is worried about it."

"Yes, but, Jack," insisted Mollie, innocently, "how could he lose the money if he did not have it?"

"I loaned it to him."

"Loaned it to him," repeated she, in amazement. "Why should you lend a man money to play against you? Supposing he got lucky and won a whole lot of money from you?"

"Don't you worry, dear. Jack's not going to lose any money. *It isn't luck*. If I trusted to that agent, I would have been broke long ago."

Mollie was beginning to see the light, and the rays almost blinded her. "If it isn't luck, what is it?" she inquired, in a breathless tone.

"Dreams," confided Davis, lovingly, "those games are fixed. Rat Morgan is one of the cleverest crooks in the country. If I want a man to win, he wins, and if I want him to lose, he loses."

A knife had entered Mollie's heart. "Then Curtis has been cheated out of his money?" she asked, in a calm voice, and then added to herself, "and I was the one who brought him here."

"Well, I wouldn't say 'cheated,'" objected Davis. "It sounds hard. Let's call it 'relieved.'"

Mollie determined to find out everything. She was up against a clever man, but leave it to a woman to find the

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

rent in his armor. "Fine work!" she exclaimed, giving him a slight hug. "But, Jack dear, how are you going to get your money back if he hasn't any? That's the rub?"

Her last remark had done the trick. Davis was now sure of her.

"Listen, Dreams. Just leave it to Jack," he replied, in a vain and self-satisfied voice. "You see, Curtis is assistant paying teller for one of the biggest banks downtown and his father is the president. Well, I hold his notes for over twenty-five thousand dollars, and he's up against it. He has promised to pay me ten thousand tomorrow, and I know that he's going to *borrow* it from the bank. If he steals this amount, I've got him where I want him. Then Morgan and Peters are going to get in with him, and they are going to turn one of the biggest robberies that has been pulled in years, and yours truly gets half, without any risk."

Mollie could scarcely believe her ears. Her Jack, whom she had looked up to, was nothing more or less than a common thief. She pressed her teeth tightly together to keep from screaming. So this was where his great power came from. Then a sense of fear stole over her. She would have to be very careful indeed, and watch her step. Afraid to trust herself further by talking to him, she kissed him on the forehead. (It was the bravest thing she had ever done.)

"Jack," commended she, although fear and disgust were gnawing at her heart, "you certainly are a wonder, and I'll help you all I can."

Then she busied herself with some things she had brought from the Palais Jardin, but her brain was working rapidly. She would save Curtis, no matter what the cost to her. When alone in her room, she clenched her fists and muttered, "God, you've double crossed me again!"

## XLVI

### JAMMING THE BRACE

**D**URING the next few days, whenever possible, Mollie engaged Rat Morgan in conversation, and played every trick in her hand to get in his good graces. The Rat, always under the influence of cocaine, began to dream. He had worshiped Mollie always, although from a distance, but now his drug-befuddled brain commenced to work. Nothing was impossible in this world! Helped by the cocaine, he planned big things for the future, and Mollie was queen of his castles in the air. Why not? Why shouldn't he love her, and why shouldn't she love him in return?

Mollie surmised what was working in his mind, and did everything in her power to strengthen his hallucination. She knew she was playing with dynamite, but she was desperate and was compelled to resort to desperate methods.

Luck favored her. Davis went away for two days. He had been tipped off by Mulvaney that Commissioner Ferguson was going to Albany, and he wanted to ascertain if it was in reference to the Carter case. Before leaving, he had failed to instruct Morgan about Curtis, except that he was to be as friendly as possible toward him.

One afternoon Mollie made decided love to the Rat, but she did not let him touch her; it was an impossibility



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

to her finer nature, although she hinted at things in the future which made him hers to command.

When Curtis came in that night she met him at the door and almost dragged him into a quiet corner of an anteroom. He was very sullen, but on Mollie's first words he sat up as if electrified.

"Jim, how much do you owe the bank?"

He glared at her suspiciously.

"Jim, I brought you here," she pleaded, putting her arm affectionately about his shoulder. "Please don't ask me any questions. But will you promise me that if you go out of here to-night, *even*, that you will never enter a gambling house again?"

"What do you mean, Mollie?" he inquired, eagerly, grasping her by the arm, his eyes lighting with hope. "For God's sake! what do you mean?"

"Jim Curtis," she continued, relentlessly, "do you know that you are a thief, although as yet you have not been found out?"

He turned his eyes away.

"If I save you, will you promise to marry that sweet little girl who's breaking her heart over you?"

"Mollie," gasped Curtis, with weary, pleading eyes, "if you do this for me, I will promise anything. You will save my life."

"Jim, I *know* that you are going to be lucky to-night."

Jim's face fell, his hopes were dashed.

"But you must do exactly as I say," Mollie kept on. "Remember, *exactly*. How much do you owe altogether, including what you have stolen from the bank?"

He flinched at the word "stolen." It sounded awful from her lips. "Twenty-eight thousand dollars will make me even and everything will be saved," he replied, trembling with eagerness.

## JAMMING THE BRACE

She whispered to him to go to Peters and get further credit for a thousand-dollar stack of chips. He blushed and took two five-hundred-dollar bills from his pocket. She looked at him in a questioning way. He lowered his gaze and put the bills back.

"You do as I say or I won't help you," threatened she. "I don't want to gamble with stolen money this night."

Curtis went to Peters and, after much coaxing, got credit for an additional thousand dollars. In the meantime Mollie saw Rat Morgan and, giving him a meaning look, asked if everything was fixed.

"Mollie dear," he replied, eagerly, "the sky's the limit."

Curtis commenced playing. He won every time, and soon the chips were piled high in front of him. His success attracted quite a crowd, and they started coppering his bets. "Play cautiously," whispered Mollie, upon a signal from the Rat. "The luck's going to turn. Only put down ten dollars at a time."

Very much against his will, he followed her instructions, and lost steadily, and so did the people who were betting with him. Finally they concluded that his winning streak was over, and left the table by ones and twos.

"Now plunge," whispered Mollie, after the crowd had dispersed.

Curtis pushed a large pile of chips hesitatingly on a number and *won*. Two more plays like this and he would be even. His heart almost still as Mollie pushed his whole pile on the black. The little silver ball galloped wildly in the opposite direction to the whirling disk, and then, slowing down gradually, hovered near the red. Curtis leaned against the table weakly and closed his eyes. When he opened them, Mollie was raking in the chips. He had *won*.

By this time the throng of people had returned and

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

were eagerly watching the play. Peters, from the outer edge of the crowd, was trying to get Rat Morgan's eye. Finally Morgan looked his way. Peters glared back at him, and Morgan raised his eyebrows, which conveyed the news to Peters that something had gone wrong and that the "brace" was "jammed."

Curtis was eager to play again, but Mollie, seeing Peters, touched him on the arm to wait a minute. She went to Peters and whispered: "What's the matter with the Rat? The big boob's letting Curtis break the bank."

"It isn't his fault," apologized Peters, humbly. "Something's out of gear. Try and get Curtis to stop playing for to-night until we can get the brace fixed."

Mollie winked understandingly and went back to Curtis. "Don't you think you have been lucky enough for one night?" she asked, tugging at his arm.

His eyes were shining like electric lamps and his cheeks were flushed with excitement. Without answering, he counted his chips. The Rat helped him. He had won thirty thousand nine hundred dollars.

"Go get those notes of yours from Peters," commanded Mollie, still tugging at his arm, "and go right home, and never enter this place again."

He tried to thank her, but she pushed him aside and ran upstairs to have a good cry. The strain had been too great.

Curtis was received cordially by Peters, who insisted there was no use paying the notes, saying that Mr. Davis was a "regular fellow" and never pressed a claim. Perhaps Mr. Curtis would like to put the money in the safe so he could play to-morrow night? Curtis insisted on getting his notes. Peters gave them to him, and Curtis, a free man, walked out to start life anew, while Mollie,

## JAMMING THE BRACE

sobbing in her apartment, realized that her real fights and hardships were still in front of her.

Morgan and Peters had a little session, and both took turns cursing the luck of Curtis. To think just when Davis had him where he wanted him, that the "brace" had to get out of order and spoil everything. Well, there was nothing to worry about. Curtis would be back, and it would be easy to again trim him. But Curtis never came back.

## XLVII

### THE RAT PAYS

**M**OLLIE, after her crying spell, began to realize the enormity of the thing she had done. Certainly she had saved Curtis, but at what a frightful cost to herself.

Davis was no fool, she reasoned, and upon his return he would soon get to the bottom of the affair, and she shivered at the thought of incurring his enmity. He was a powerful ally, but as an enemy he would be terrible. Donnelly faded into insignificance beside him. After long and careful thought, she concluded her only salvation was to leave New York and go thousands of miles away and start all over again.

Davis had been very generous to her in the matter of jewels. It would be easy to convert them into money enough to tide her over for at least a year, but the jewels were locked securely in his safe. He had always insisted that, when not wearing them, she give them to him for safekeeping.

The only thing to do was to await his return and bide her chance. But there was another angle; she could not bear to have him kiss her; her respect and admiration had turned to hate and fear, mingled with disgust.

Then there was still another danger confronting her. She had placed herself in the power of Rat Morgan, a cocaine fiend, and no doubt he would play his advantage to the limit. Mollie was almost distracted; she planned

## THE RAT PAYS

and planned, but each idea met with an obstacle she could not surmount.

If she did run away, where could she go and how could she get her things from the apartment? She had it! Mary could help her. Why hadn't she thought of her before? She rushed to the telephone and called her number. Mr. Newman answered the phone and informed her that Mary was visiting his mother and would not be back for a couple of months.

Mollie thanked him and hung up. Still there was one other hope left. At her modiste's where she purchased her gowns there was a girl named Kitty, whom Mollie had taken quite an interest in. Kitty seemed to be a very nice girl and was well posted on everything that happened around town. She decided Kitty would be the one to help her.

The next day Davis returned, and she tried her best to be nice to him, but failed miserably. He noticed her strange manner and guessed there was something wrong, and determined to find out what it was.

He rang for Peters and asked for a report on the business. Peters entered, ill at ease. The receipts had fallen off greatly, and in addition he would have to explain the Curtis affair. Davis studied the reports carefully and came to the amount won opposite Curtis's name.

He glanced at Mollie, but she was busy with some needlework, apparently paying no attention to what was transpiring. He then looked back at Peters.

"Well?" he questioned.

Peters cleared his throat and commenced in an apologetic manner: "Mr. Davis, Rat was working the brace, but somehow it got jammed and Curtis played in great luck and just cleaned up. I tried to stall him off, but he paid the notes and hasn't shown up since."

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Davis got black in the face with rage. So this was the way they let things go to hell during his absence. "So the brace got jammed, did it?" he yelled. "What in the hell do you think I am, trying to tell me the brace got jammed? There's another kind of a jam going on, and I'm going to find it out damned quick. Send Morgan up here, and if you hear any noise don't interfere. Now get out."

Mollie was almost fainting from fear, but Davis gave her no notice.

The Rat entered with a jaunty air; he had taken an extra "shot" to brace himself for the interview. Davis looked at him, then got up, went to the door, locked it, and put the key in the safe and twirled the combination. Every movement was slow and deliberate. Morgan stared at him with wide-open eyes, while Mollie slyly watched every move he made out of the corner of her eye.

"Mollie," he announced, calmly, "I'm going to show you how I deal with those that double cross me."

He had not called her "Dreams." It was indeed a sign that boded no good.

He took off his coat and, folding it neatly, laid it across the arm of a chair. Then he went over to Morgan, who was standing like one paralyzed. "So the brace got jammed, did it?" he hissed in his face. "Well, take that!" And he hit him on the point of the jaw with his fist. Morgan fell to the floor like a log. Mollie screamed and crouched in the corner. "You shut up!" threatened Davis, scowling at her, "and don't move out of this room, or I'll attend to you, too." His eyes were blood-shot from rage. Mollie crouched farther into the corner and did not answer.

Davis then went to the prostrate form and by a lock of hair lifted his head from the floor. Morgan was uncon-

## THE RAT PAYS

scious and the blood trickled in a small stream from the corner of his mouth. Davis kicked him twice in the face. The Rat's eye began to swell and puff from the first blow, while two lower teeth protruded through his lip from the effects of the second.

The blood was forming a small pool on the floor near his chin. Davis sat down on the sofa, lighted a cigar, and commenced smoking, calmly waiting for him to regain consciousness. Mollie, in horror, covered her face with her hands. Again she was seeing the result of her work. She had persuaded Morgan to let Curtis win. She tried to call out to Davis that it was all her fault, but she was powerless.

The form on the carpet moved. His eyes opened slowly and his head raised from the floor, then he got up painfully and stood unsteadily on his feet.

Davis flicked the ashes from his cigar and, placing it on an ash tray, motioned Morgan to come to him. Morgan advanced step by step, like a baby learning to walk. Mollie tried to scream, but no sound came from her lips. When he got near enough, Davis measured his distance and again let fly with his fist. The blow caught Morgan squarely on the nose. The blood spurted at the impact; he fell backward, and his head hit the floor with a resounding whack.

Mollie thought he was killed, and moaned aloud. Davis paid no attention to her, but, stooping over Morgan, kicked him in the face until it lost the semblance of a human being. It was one mass of blood and torn flesh.

With an insane look in his eyes, Davis took two steps toward Mollie. "You see how I handle them, don't you?" he cursed. "Well, come over here and kiss me."

Mollie cowered in the corner.

"Come over here and *kiss* me!" he thundered.



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Mollie vowed she would die before she kissed such a beast.

"Don't let me tell you again," he cautioned, advancing toward her. "Come here and kiss me, or what you've seen will be nothing to what you will see."

A force stronger than Mollie's will relentlessly compelled her to move in his direction. As if hypnotized, she advanced, step by step. He never took his eyes from hers. When she came near enough, she put up her lips and kissed him on the cheek. Suddenly she felt a singing and rushing in her ears, then a far-off voice commanded, "Go into the other room and get into bed and stay there." Like one in a dream, she obeyed.

When the door had closed behind her, Davis rubbed his hand across his face and his gaze wandered around the room until it lighted on the body of Rat Morgan. He went to the body and looked at it, dazed, trying to remember. "This is the second time it's happened to me," he muttered, blinking his eyes. "Some day I'm going to kill some one, and then I'll swing."

He stumbled into the bathroom, got a wet towel, and bathed Morgan's face, saying to himself: "I mussed him up pretty bad, but it serves him right and will teach him a lesson. But I've got to be more careful. Supposing I had killed him?"

Morgan regained consciousness, but he was a terrible-looking sight. His eyes were like two slits in raw meat. Groaning loudly, he raised himself slowly on his hands, and then, after a hard effort, gained a sitting position.

"Morgan, I'm master around here. Ain't I?"

Morgan nodded his head painfully.

"Come here, then, and lick my shoes, you scum!" commanded Davis, holding out his foot.

Morgan, inch by inch, crawled to him and with his

## THE RAT PAYS

bruised and bleeding face endeavored to kiss his master's feet. Davis laughed at his attempts, and then, drawing his foot back, kicked him in the already mangled mouth. Morgan emitted a groaning sigh and sat back feebly, the blood dripping into his lap.

Thoroughly satisfied with himself, Davis grasped him by the shoulders and jerked him to his feet. Morgan steadied himself with both hands against the wall.

"Morgan, I'm through with you for life," he snarled. "And remember, you're blacklisted in this town. I'm going to lay off you for a couple of months to give that handsome phiz a chance to heal, but this goes—if ever I lay eyes on you again I'll kill you. Now get out."

By using his hands against the wall, Morgan managed to reach the door. He tried to open it, but it was locked. "It's locked—it's locked—" he moaned, struggling with the knob.

Davis went to the door and shoved him roughly out of the way. Where was the key? What had he done with it? He entered the room where Mollie was crouched on the bed. "Dreams," he inquired, "do you know what I did with the key to the door?"

"You put it in the safe," she answered, mechanically.

"Put it in the safe?" he muttered, going into the other room. "Am I crazy?" He went to the safe, got the key, opened the door, and, as Morgan left, gave him a parting kick.

That night he did not go near Mollie. His brain was in a fog. Something had happened to him and he couldn't figure out what it was.

But the next morning he was himself again and realized that he had perhaps been a fool in his treatment of Rat Morgan. He had cast out a valuable man, but he was so vain he hated to admit it, even to himself.

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

He was very sweet to Mollie and tried everything in his power to make her forget what she had seen, but Mollie was now deathly afraid of him. She regarded him as a fiend, a beast, one who was liable to commit any crime. She was going to escape from him even if she had to kill herself to do so.

## XLVIII

### THE GET-AWAY

THE following day Mollie saw Kitty at the modiste's, to ask her assistance in helping her to get out of New York. She offered her money.

"You are living with Roulette Jack, aren't you?" asked Kitty, ignoring the bills held out to her.

Mollie blushed. The shame of it! This was the first time she had heard her connection with Davis mentioned in such a frank manner. "Yes," she moaned, avoiding the gaze of Kitty, "God help me! I am."

"I'll never accept money for helping you to get away from that crook," announced Kitty, her eyes snapping. "I've got a friend—Nannette. Ever hear of her?"

Mollie replied in the negative. "Well," continued Kitty, "me and Nannette has got a score to settle with that gent. Nannette's up the river now, but she's wise to the whole frame-up and the judge is going to get her clear. Then Roulette Jack had better look out."

Mollie confided her troubles to Kitty, and between them they planned a way to escape. Mollie sent her clothes to Kitty's house, piece by piece, and, taking advantage of Davis's good mood, kept asking him for money for new dresses. He showered her with clothes and jewels. At last, when too late, he was realizing that he loved her.

Kitty quietly pawned or sold the jewelry and clothing, and before long they had several thousand dollars in cash.

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Then Kitty arranged for her to go to Eagle Nest, where her father was born, and bought a ticket in advance.

Three weeks passed and affairs were getting worse and worse for Davis. Commissioner Ferguson had put the screws on the department and Mulvaney had been "broke" and dismissed from the force in disgrace, Davis thereby losing a valuable connection. In addition, the chief was demanding twice as much for the privilege of staying open, and, despite his power and influence, Davis had to "come across" or else be closed up like the others.

The night before Mollie intended to leave, Davis called her into the sitting room. "Listen, Dreams," he confided. "I've a big fellow in tow, met him while I was in Albany, and he's coming down to the city day after to-morrow. Now we've got to trim him and trim him right, because the haul should net us about sixty or seventy thousand, and there ain't a bit of risk. He'll fall easy for a good-looking girl like you."

Mollie apparently listened attentively while he laid out his campaign, but her mind was working on another plan.

Rat Morgan's face healed slowly into the semblance of a human being, but the blows of Davis had left many scars and he was a horrible sight to behold. Cocaine had mastered him to such an extent that he could barely get enough to satisfy him. Being blacklisted by Davis, he couldn't get work anywhere—that is, not the kind he wanted—so he drifted down the current until an eddy carried him back to the haunts of "yeggs" and "dips."

They were glad to receive him, because at times his brain was like a steel trap and he planned many successful coups. In his heart the Rat nursed a burning hatred for Davis and was biding his time to get even, but he was a good waiter, and was cunning enough not to hurry things, his prison experience standing him in good stead. In his

## THE GET-AWAY

drug-crazed way he adored Mollie and did not blame her for his trouble; he was just waiting until fortune turned, then he would find her, offer his love, and they would go off together and settle down, leaving New York far behind them.

As the time for her departure drew near, Mollie's nerves were on the raw edge. Would Davis never go out? Finally he rose to go, and said he would be back about six o'clock and take her out to supper.

She waited half an hour to give him a chance to get well away, then, placing a note she had written for the occasion on the table, she slipped quietly out the back way.

Walking hurriedly to Broadway, she hailed a taxi and proceeded to the Pennsylvania Station, where Kitty was waiting for her. Kitty, pursuant to the plan mapped out by them, had sent a telegram to a Mrs. Stevens, a distant relative, at Eagle Nest, informing that *Mollie Weston* would arrive at Minton at six thirty Friday morning, and to have a conveyance meet her to take her to Eagle Nest.

Bidding Kitty an affectionate farewell, Mollie went to the train entrance, where a uniformed attendant at the gate examined her ticket carefully, punched it, and handed it back to her. When safely on the train and it commenced to move, she breathed a sigh of relief. It was carrying her to a new future and a new life.

As the train entered the tube under the river Mollie remembered what a chorus girl named Floss had told her years before: "*—and some day, when you meet a decent fellow that wants to marry you, you'll be mighty glad that you gave Donnelly the go-by.*" She remembered, and wondered if she would ever meet a *decent* fellow who really wanted to marry her, one who loved her for herself. And then, for the first time, the significance of her life with

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Davis dawned upon her. She would never be able to look a decent man in the face, much less marry him.

Two tears stole down her cheeks and she looked out of the window to hide her emotion from her fellow passengers.

When Mollie had passed through the entrance to the train, Rat Morgan came from behind a crowd of people, where he had been practicing his new trade of picking pockets. He was right; it was Mollie Eastman and she was going out of town, and without Davis. Something must be wrong. Determined to investigate, the Rat sauntered over to the gate and familiarly addressed the attendant who had punched her ticket.

"Hello, Bob! How's things?"

The man gazed intently at the Rat. "Holy smoke!" he exclaimed. "It's Johnny Muldoon! But for the love o' Mike, what's happened to your face?"

"Not so loud, Bob," whispered Morgan. "My name's Morgan now, and I'm doing some gumshoe work for Pinkerton."

After a few minutes' conversation, Morgan, learning the destination of Mollie's ticket, scribbled it in a very much worn and dog-eared notebook.

Some day, when he had made a haul, he would go out there and marry her. But why was she leaving town? Well, it was none of his business and it wouldn't do to be butting into Davis's affairs. It was too dangerous, and he could never forget the session he had had with him for "jamming a brace."

Secreting his precious notebook in an inside pocket, he mingled with the crowd in the hopes of "lifting a silver."

Besides his other talents acquired at Sing Sing, Morgan had become an expert pickpocket.

## LXIX

### MOLLIE "WESTON"

AS the train speeded from New York, Mollie's curiosity got the better of her fears. It was the first time in her life she had ridden in a Pullman. Kitty had secured her a section to insure that she would be alone. Mollie gazed around her, and there wasn't a detail that escaped her notice. Everything was of interest. She wondered where all the people were going to sleep. Figure it out as she would, she couldn't guess how she was going to get undressed. Perhaps people did not undress on trains, just slept in their clothes. She had heard that there were beds, but, not seeing any, she gave it up and waited for things to develop.

When the porter came through, announcing that dinner was served in the dining car, Mollie, although nearly starved, dared not move. A man sitting in front of her got up, and she decided he was going to the dining car, because he *looked* hungry. Accordingly, she followed him through the aisles, bumping into a seat at each lurch of the train.

Once, as she reached for a hold, her hand slipped and she plumped into the lap of an elderly gentleman. He apologized profusely for being in the way. Several people laughed, but Mollie, in her confusion, answered, hardly knowing what she was saying: "I'm sorry that you were in the way— I mean that you're sorry—" With her face burning, she hurried on.



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

The man in front of her was disappearing rapidly, and she speeded up, because it would never do to let him get away from her. She trailed him through car after car, the train seeming a mile long, until he came to a halt. This must surely be the diner. She paused and peered through the glass door; then, summoning courage, she entered; the porter came to her rescue and she inquired if it were the dining car.

"Dinah am about ten cars back, miss," he replied, politely, smothering a laugh. "You been a-traveling de wrong way."

Greatly embarrassed, she thanked him meekly and retraced her footsteps until, without accident, she reached the diner, where she was repaid fully for her adventurous trip.

When the porter had made up her berth she was delighted with the arrangements, and, crawling in, was soon fast asleep. The next morning she awoke bright and early; she did not want to miss any of this wonderful trip which was carrying her rapidly away from her troubles.

Following Kitty's instructions, she was very careful not to mix with anyone on the train. There was no use taking chances of having her whereabouts known, although every mile that unrolled behind her made her breathe freer, but she had not lost her fear of the power of Davis.

In reply to her query, the conductor informed her she would arrive at her destination at six thirty the next morning. Before retiring, she packed her things carefully and told the porter confidentially she was getting off at Minton and for him to be sure that the train stopped so that she would not miss her station. She gave him five dollars to brighten his memory. He assured her the engineer was a friend of his and would attend to the matter personally.

## MOLLIE "WESTON"

Try as she would, she could not sleep, so she rehearsed her new role and repeated her new name loudly, "Mollie Weston," over and over again, to get used to its sound. She kept it up until a gruff voice from the berth across the way interrupted her rudely:

"Go tell it to the engineer; he doesn't need any sleep, but I do."

Mollie caught her breath and stopped in the middle of a word. The train was lurching and tossing as if continually going around curves at high speed. To her it seemed that morning would never come. Every now and then she raised the curtain and took a peep out of the window, but darkness was her only reward.

Tired out, she dozed off and dreamed that the long arm of Davis was reaching to strangle her, and she awoke with a scream. The porter had just jerked her bedclothes to inform her that it was time to get up. It did not take her long to learn that dressing hurriedly in a Pullman berth is quite an accomplishment in itself.

The train came to a stop and, assisted by the porter, she stepped to the platform of a small wooden station. The sky was gray, and it was drizzling a cold, misty rain. The place was deserted except for a man unloading some trunks from the baggage car.

What a terrible place! Everywhere she looked she received the same cold, gray reception. Finally she gathered courage and crossed over to the man who was now struggling with her wardrobe trunk, at the same time talking to himself in a loud voice:

"Gets by me what they carries in these new-fangled contraptions they calls trunks. 'Pears to me that nobody ain't entitled to so much baggage."

Mollie interrupted his flow of conversation by touching him timidly on the arm. He paused in his efforts and,

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

shifting a large-sized cud of tobacco from one cheek to the other, stared at her with frank curiosity. She as frankly stared back at him. They had each met a new type and were mutually interested.

Mollie spoke first. "Will you be kind enough to tell me where I can telephone for a taxi?"

The man glanced at her in disdain, and then, selecting the hub of the wheel of the baggage truck as a promising target, he squirted a thin stream of tobacco juice in its direction. The liquid projectile registered a direct hit. "There's a telephone in the station," he chuckled, noting the result of his marksmanship with an approving eye, "but I 'ain't heard of nobody as yet *gittin'* a taxi by callin' on it."

"But how am I going to get a taxi?" inquired Mollie, in desperation.

He tried another shot at the hub, but missed. "It 'pears to me, miss, that you ain't goin' to get one, 'cause there ain't nothin' hereabouts which resembles one o' them things, unless it be Abe Switch's Ford, an' that's laid up with a busted tire."

"But I can't stay here," protested Mollie, trying to keep her temper. "I *must* go to a hotel until I can get something to carry me and my trunk to Eagle Nest."

Her reply caused him to regard her with added interest. So *she* was the owner of that monstrous piece of baggage. "Old Bill orter be along any minute with his rig from the hotel," he returned. "Fust time he's been late in over seven year. But Bill's team don't jest naturally like to hurry, and Bill never argues much with 'em. It 'pears that them two hosses of hisn jest naturally runs him. You don't happen to be one o' them show people, do you, miss?"

Mollie's resentment died out. The man was really

## MOLLIE "WESTON"

interesting and she liked him. "No," she replied, drawing her cloak around her shoulders. "I am just an ordinary person, and I have come to Eagle Nest for a rest and a change of air."

"Guess you'd better get under the shed," he admonished, slightly disappointed at her answer. "This mist gets you wet in no time."

Accepting his advice, she moved over to the shelter, the man following her, but first taking another shot at the hub. He hit it.

"Well, I reckon you'll get all the rest you're lookin' for at Eagle Nest. The only real live person in that place is the parson, an' he makes up for the rest o' them."

Mollie let him ramble on without interruption; it was easier than asking questions, and, besides, she felt very downhearted as she peered drearily at the sky.

"It ain't this way all the time," he volunteered, in an apologetic voice, noticing her look. "Now yesterday was as nice a day as anybody'd want, and 'tain't goin' to be so bad to-day, 'cause the wind's shifted from the east an' it wouldn't surprise me if the sun was a-shinin' in a couple o' hours."

Coming up the road to the station was a plodding team of horses which at intervals of a few yards stopped and nibbled grass on the roadside. At each stop the driver pulled on the lines gently and the team would start, but not without one of the horses turning its head to the rear, as if reproaching him.

"Here comes Old Bill now," informed the station agent, pointing to the approaching wagon. "Reckon he'll take you over to the hotel—that is, if that team o' hisn don't object to that air trunk o' yours."

Old Bill drove up to the edge of the platform, got down from his seat, and walked in their direction. "Hello,

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Hank!" he shouted. "I'm a little late, but these here horses jest about condescended to pull me here."

"Better get a move on, Bill," answered Hank. "Here's a customer for that hotel o' yours, and she's lookin' for a taxi. You better hustle or you'll lose out."

Old Bill came to Mollie and removed his hat. "Where was you figurin' on goin', miss?" he inquired, respectfully.

"Which is the best hotel in town?"

Chuckling to himself, the old man winked at Hank before replying. "Well, I guess that 'ere's a toss up as which is best. Some say the Palace Hotel, an' others say the Hotel Palace, and still others say that there ain't no *best* hotel in the place, an' I guess they're about right."

"Then please take me to the Hotel Palace."

"Personally I recommend the Palace Hotel, but, better still, I'll drive you to both of 'em and you can take your choice."

"Don't mind him, miss," exclaimed Hank, laughingly; "he's jest havin' his joke. There ain't two hotels in this town; there's only one, and you couldn't exactly call it a hotel, either. Why they call it the 'Palace' gets by *me*."

Old Bill, still chuckling to himself at his joke, fumbled in his coat and brought forth a crumpled telegram and handed it to Mollie. "My eyes is sort o' gone back on me, miss," he apologized, "but take a look at this an' see if it means you. Emily Stevens give it to me yesterday."

"Yes," answered Mollie, recognizing it as the one Kitty had sent, "it was sent by me, and I wish to be taken to Eagle Nest, if you please."

Old Bill all the while was eying her trunk dubiously and wondering if his team would stand for it.

"It belongs to me," apologized Mollie, guessing what was in his mind, "and if you'll please send a porter for it I'll be much obliged."

## MOLLIE "WESTON"

"A porter!" he chuckled, his sides shaking. "Well, miss, I'm the porter, proprietor, chambermaid, desk clerk, and sometimes, when there's a rush an' the old woman ain't up to snuff, I *has* to be the chef also."

"Come on," advised Hank, comparing Mollie's baggage check with the one attached to her trunk. "Let's get this trunk into the wagin, 'cause I reckon this young lady needs her breakfast."

After much affected grunting and straining, intermixed with sundry remarks as to its weight and size, the pair loaded the trunk on the wagon. The horses were interested and curious spectators during the operation, turning their heads constantly to the rear. Mollie was very tired and hungry; the drizzling mist had commenced to penetrate, and she felt cold and uncomfortable. When Old Bill had helped her to her place in the wagon he pulled a bag of dry hay from under the seat and arranged it for her to sit on; then, wrapping a canvas tarpaulin carefully about her shoulders, he clucked to his horses and the wagon started on its way to the Palace Hotel, a distance of about three city blocks from the station. At the hotel Old Bill's wife, Hannah, was waiting for them. She was a motherly-looking woman, with a round, smiling face, but she was *fat*. Mollie guessed her weight at two hundred and fifty pounds, and only missed by a few ounces.

Hannah, radiating good humor, received her cordially and conducted her up a rickety flight of stairs to the "best room," where she bustled about, dusting here and there while Mollie marveled at her agility.

About three quarters of an hour after Hannah had left, the loud ringing of a bell in the hall announced that breakfast was ready, and Mollie lost no time in getting down to the dining room, where she enjoyed a hearty meal.

"Well, miss," admonished Old Bill, poking his head

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

through the door, "we better start for Eagle Nest. It's about an eight-mile drive, an' the sun's beginnin' to shine, an' I gotta meet the evenin' train, an' that team o' mine ain't what you'd call race horses. They naturally likes to loaf, an' I never hurries 'em."

Mollie signified she was ready, and followed him to the front porch, where she gasped in admiration of the view. In front of her stretched a beautiful panorama of green-clothed hills. The sun, breaking through the scurrying clouds and shining on the wet leaves, gave the impression of countless diamonds. And the air! She breathed in deeply and it sent the blood tingling through her veins. "This town ain't much as far as towns goes," acclaimed Old Bill, with pride, keenly observing her delight, "but it certainly do clear up quick, an' I guess the air around here can't be beat. Jest jump in that wagin, miss, and I'll show you some views on the way to Eagle Nest what'll make you stare. Even them pesky horses has to stop and look."

## L

### EAGLE NEST

THE ride to Eagle Nest was a revelation to Mollie. Her constant exclamations of delight pleased Old Bill greatly and he proudly pointed out everything of interest on the way. The horses ran true to form and every now and then stopped, but not to look at the view, for a tempting tuft of grass on the roadside, or an overhanging branch, was the lure. Mollie's troubles were forgotten in the joy of living. The hills around her held no stage entrances with waiting *roués*. The streams did not ripple with wines and beers, and the sweet-scented breezes wafting through breaks in the roadside foliage were not foul-smelling breaths blown across dirty tables.

The chirping of the birds took the place of jazz orchestras, and a blue-tinted haze, hovering over the valley bottoms, replaced the heavy, stale-smelling tobacco smoke of the cabarets and gambling hells. Mollie's mind was working rapidly. With these beautiful surroundings, the people must be angels. For the first time in her life she was going to meet human beings whom she could trust, whom she could have faith in. Then she suddenly remembered what she had been through, what she was. She was unfit to mix with these simple, wholesome folks! She, a girl without honor, a cabaret performer, an enticer of men to a gambling hell. Would these people accept her if they knew? Decidedly not! Therefore they must



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

never know. She would always have to live a lie among them, and the thought was not pleasant, but there was no other course open to her, because there was no use trying to run away from herself; it just could not be done.

As the team jogged slowly on its way the beauties of the scenery unfolding before her gradually brushed aside her gloomy thoughts, and by the time Old Bill had driven up to a beautiful little cottage resting in a cleft in the mountain side she was a care-free, rollicking girl of sixteen.

"Well, miss," grinned Old Bill, turning in his seat, "this is Emily Stevens's home, and I reckon there ain't nothin' got it beat much for flowers."

Mollie gave one look and raised her hands in delight. The garden was literally a mass of various-colored flowers. To her it was spring's fashion *Revue*, and the flowers were beautiful chorus girls made up from nature's make-up box.

A woman about fifty years of age, with snow-white hair tucked neatly under a little house cap, hurried down the gravel-covered walk to meet them. She was neatness personified, and was a perfect blend for the gently swaying flowers and shrubbery on each side of her, and her smile matched the sun's rays. It made Mollie feel warm and welcome.

"Howdy, Emily?" called Old Bill. "Look jest as spry as ever. I done brought your guest to you safe an' sound, an' judging by her looks, I reckon she ain't a bad match for them flowers you're so mighty perticular about."

"Howdy, Bill?" replied Mrs. Stevens, waving her hand to them. "How did you leave Hannah?"

She approached the wagon and heartily shook hands with Mollie, who had gotten out and was waiting for her, while Old Bill was busy wrestling with her trunk. After the handshake, with a hand on each shoulder, Mrs.

## EAGLE NEST

Stevens held Mollie at arm's length and surveyed her critically. An observer of her greeting would have thought it was her own daughter who had just returned from a prolonged absence. Satisfied with her scrutiny, she put her arm around Mollie's waist and kissed her twice on the lips. Mollie was too surprised to return the first kiss, but, recovering quickly, made up for her neglect by the warmth of the second.

Mrs. Stevens clasped her hand chummily and led her up the path to the cottage, calling over her shoulder to Old Bill, "Put the trunk on the front porch—that is, if it ain't too heavy for you."

"It ain't too hefty," snorted the old man. "It's just *big*, but I reckon if I kin handle Hannah I kin handle it."

"Come right into your room and get them things off," counseled Mrs. Stevens, upon entering the house. "I just bet you're tired to death after that terrible train ride, and all the way from New York, too. There ain't much style about this house, 'cause it's just *plain*, but I want you to get to home right away."

"I think your home is just too lovely for anything," replied Mollie, "and I know I am going to be happy in it."

"Well, I'm glad you like it, 'cause I was a little afraid it wouldn't suit you, seein' you're from the city and used to such elegant things. 'Tain't often Eagle Nest sees city folks. The rest of the village is just dyin' to get a glimpse of you an' wanted to be here to meet you when I told 'em about your telegram. But, no, sir, I just put my foot down and says, 'Nobody gets to see her, not even the parson, until she gets a chance to get settled, an' when Emily Stevens says somethin' an' puts her foot down, there ain't nobody in Eagle Nest goin' to gainsay her.'"

Mollie readily understood the reason why nobody would

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

"gainsay" her, because it was not by fear she ruled; it was by *love*.

Old Bill, now in his shirt sleeves, finally succeeding in getting the trunk on the front porch, stood contemplating it while with a huge red bandana handkerchief he mopped the perspiration streaming down his face and neck.

"You put that coat on instanter," commanded Mrs. Stevens from the hall. "Do you want to catch your death of cold? Men never did have any sense, nohow. Come on; put that coat on and go back in the kitchen and get a drink of that cold buttermilk next the churn, and don't put your clumsy feet in the butter platter on the floor."

The old man meekly got into his coat at Emily's words, but at the mention of the buttermilk his face brightened visibly.

"Bill just dotes on buttermilk," informed Emily, confidentially, as the old man disappeared into the kitchen, "and would go a mile out of his way for some of mine. He's a dear old soul, and he's got the nicest wife, too, only Hannah's *stout*."

When his thirst was satisfied, and after some good-natured banter, Old Bill bade them good-by and started down the gravel walk to his team, but Mrs. Stevens caught him by the arm.

"You just get hold of that trunk and lug it into the spare room, and mind the carpet," she ordered.

He grunted in reply, but soon had the trunk in Mollie's room. Unseen by Old Bill, Mollie made a motion to open her purse to pay him, but Emily shook her head and whispered:

"Don't offer him any money, 'cause it'll break his heart. Perhaps when you go down to the station you can pay Hannah; she's more practical and sees things different from Bill."

## EAGLE NEST

Mollie thanked him cordially for bringing her out.

"Little girl," he answered, clasping her hand in his rough palm, "me and Jim and Bob are always ready to give you a hand, an' not forgettin' Hannah." With this remark, he waved a farewell, climbed up on his wagon, and was off.

Mollie asked Mrs. Stevens who Jim and Bob were.

"Jim and Bob?" returned she. "They're his fool horses. I think Bill would sleep with them if Hannah would let him. He's never been known to use a whip on either of them, and down in the village they say he nearly killed a traveling salesman for throwing a rock at them."

Mrs. Stevens helped Mollie unpack her trunk, and uttered exclamations of delight as dress after dress was laid out for her inspection. Immediately after determining to quit Davis, Mollie had ordered from the modiste several dresses which she judged would be simple enough for the country. They were simple in design, but the materials and lines had the stylish stamp of Fifth Avenue. To Mrs. Stevens they were creations. As Mollie handed her each dress, she inspected it critically and then hung it in a spacious clothes closet. When the last one had been put in its place Mrs. Stevens placed her hands on her hips and whistled.

"Well, Priscilla Winters had better look to her laurels!" she exclaimed.

At Mollie's puzzled expression, she hastened to explain. "Priscilla is the belle of the village, and some folks says she's playin' up to the parson, but from what I've seen I think the parson's goin' to be a pretty steady caller at a certain cottage."

A parson! Mollie gasped in dismay. She wouldn't know how to act in front of one. She, as far as she could remember, had never been to church in her life, except

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

at Mrs. Henderson's funeral. A parson! This indeed was a new problem. No doubt he wore glasses and carried a hymn book. Good night! She saw her finish.

"Westley Thompson," continued Mrs. Stevens—"that's the parson's name—is the best parson you've ever met."

Mollie did not dispute her, but mentally sized him up as being the best and worst she had ever met. Her experience with Donnelly and Davis had steeled her so that she was willing to meet any man on an equal footing and battle with him, if necessary, but a parson was an unknown quantity. Well, she could only do her best.

By the time everything was straightened out Emily announced lunch. Mollie was decidedly hungry, the mountain air having added a sharp edge to her appetite. During lunch Emily talked at a rapid gait, giving Mollie an insight into the characters of the people who were going to call on her that afternoon at three.

## LI

### THE PARSON

**M**OLLIE had put on one of her simple frocks for the momentous occasion, and was awaiting nervously the ordeal of being presented formally to the society of Eagle Nest.

In the interval between luncheon and three o'clock she and Emily were fast becoming friends. Mollie told her the story she had carefully rehearsed, but it hurt her deeply to deceive the dear woman. Living a lie was harder than it had at first appeared.

Mollie said she was an orphan and had been living with her aunt in New York. The aunt had died and left her a little money. She had taken singing lessons for a year, and had then gone on the stage, but the life didn't appeal to her, so she came to Eagle Nest to rest and to decide on her future. Emily was a sympathetic listener.

Upon receipt of a letter from Kitty, written about ten days before Mollie's arrival, Mrs. Stevens had informed the rest of the village that a real live actress was expected to join the community, and there was quite a stir. The "high society" of the village had split immediately into two factions. One in favor of having an actress admitted to their sacred circle, and the other against it. Unable to reach a satisfactory compromise, both sides had taken their case to the parson. He was in a quandary, seeing trouble in front of him so far as his con-

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

gregation was concerned, no matter how he decided the dispute.

If Miss Weston proved to be a trouble maker, years of his work in Eagle Nest would come to naught; therefore he concluded to reserve his decision until after her arrival, so that he could size her up before he took sides.

To be prepared he had written a sermon in advance, which he intended to preach on the first Sunday the actress attended church. This sermon would be a hint to her to play square. If it failed, he concluded to put the matter before her and ask her to leave if, in his mind, he judged her to be an evil or disturbing influence.

In a good many ways Westley Thompson was broad-minded. He preached the gospel of God so that humans could understand it. Not believing in words alone, he strove to set an example by his own actions. Thompson was red blooded and never preached hell and damnation, and brought issues before his people which many ministers would have gladly sidetracked.

The first Sunday of his arrival in Eagle Nest, during his sermon, he was interrupted constantly by a saloon keeper, who, although having never met him, imagined he had a grievance against the parson. He was acknowledged to be the bully of the town, and under the influence of liquor had attended church with the expressed purpose of breaking up the service and thus showing the "whippersnapper" that he brooked no interference in the bossing of the village. Thompson, from the pulpit, in a mild voice, ordered him to withdraw or else to keep quiet.

The disturber paid no attention, but continued singing a ribald song. The parson calmly closed the Bible in front of him and, requesting his congregation to remain seated, walked down the aisle until he came to the bully,

## THE PARSON

and insisted that he leave. Without warning, the saloon keeper swung his fist and blacked the parson's eye. The village constable ran to help him, but he brushed him aside. Then, getting a firm grip on the man's collar, he dragged him through the aisle and out of the church.

By this time the congregation was in an uproar and crowded from the church to see that no harm came to the parson. Outside, there took place the prettiest battle between the two that could be remembered by the oldest inhabitant. Thompson gave the man a severe beating and soon had him begging for mercy. Ignoring his appeals, Thompson dragged him back into the church and sat him in a pew, with orders to remain there until the service was over. He went to the pulpit and, after regaining his breath, finished the sermon without once referring to the fight.

The affair caused quite a commotion in the village, but the parson paid no attention to it, and finally, winning out by his magnetic personality, welded his congregation together as it never before had been welded. From that time on the saloon keeper became an earnest church goer, and eventually closed his saloon to enter into a more respectable business.

For years since, Thompson had never had any trouble, but now it appeared that this actress from New York was liable to force him to resort to drastic action again.



## LII

### "CATS"

**M**OLLIE'S advent was the main topic of the village, and the villagers looked forward eagerly to the course the parson would pursue, because it would be another epoch in the history of Eagle Nest. Two or three of the congregation, who had personally issued to themselves free transportation to heaven, were the chief trouble makers. They passed among the congregation and tried to induce them to sign a petition to keep this painted woman from their midst. But, meeting with only mediocre success, their curiosity triumphed over their self-made religion and they decided they would be the first to call on Mollie, because they were so pure themselves it was impossible for them to be contaminated, and they would protect the weaker ones about them.

Ninety per cent of the male congregation were awaiting the arrival of Mollie with great gusto, and it is needless to remark that their wives kept sharp eyes on them.

Mrs. Stevens was the center of the controversy, and the faction against Mollie had sent a committee to her, demanding that she telegraph, saying there was no room in her house for an actress.

Being a true Christian and not an architect of the Tower of Babel, she sent them about their business, saying she would judge the woman when she saw her, and not before. And even if she were as bad as they had

## "CATS"

painted her, then it was up to her to reform her, and she was going to do it.

It was with this intention in mind that she welcomed Mollie, and received the most pleasant shock of her life.

Now she was waiting for the callers with the secret satisfaction that they were also going to get the jolt of their religious lives, but to some of them it would not be so pleasant.

The minister had required that Mollie be given a fair chance and that no ~~one~~ should meet her except Mrs. Stevens. The parson's word was law, and nobody had disobeyed it openly, but as Old Bill drove up to the Stevens cottage with Mollie, many curious eyes peered through conveniently closed shutters or drawn-together curtains.

Not one of them dared to call before the parson. They were not afraid of him exactly, but he had such an embarrassing way of suddenly asking questions. He seemed to be able to read what one was *actually* thinking, and he had absolutely no regard for one's feelings. And it was very often *terribly* inconvenient to answer some of his questions *truthfully*, especially in the presence of others.

Promptly at three o'clock the parson appeared at the front gate of the Stevens cottage, and strode down the path toward the door. Mollie was peeping through the curtains of the front window, so as to get an advance view of the enemy, and had selected this outpost for that purpose. A broad-shouldered man, about six feet in height, with long strides approached nearer and nearer.

"That's him," said Emily, nudging Mollie.

Mollie gazed in wonder. This man had on a gray suit, and in his hand was a *baseball*. Where was his hymn book? He was actually good looking and did not wear spectacles. Her heart beat faster as a loud knock at the

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

door intimated the enemy was about to enter. Even in his knock there was something forceful; it instinctively made one hurry to open the door.

For some unaccountable reason Mollie was trembling all over. She, a girl of the world, who was used to battling with men for her very existence, was trembling at the thought of meeting a minister. To her it was incredible.

Emily ushered him into the room and Mollie advanced hesitatingly to meet him. She had determined previously not to move an inch in his direction and to be very "up-stage" with him, but now she was actually moving forward to be introduced.

At Thompson's first words her haughtiness went out the window. His voice was as commanding as his knock, but not unpleasantly so, as if he were the master, but soothing and restful, as if he were a superior officer who had come to the relief of a subaltern who, although besieged by overwhelming odds, had made a gallant defense.

Grasping the extended hand of Mollie in a firm grip, he held fast to it. "Welcome to Eagle Nest, Miss Weston," he said, with a kindly look, "and may your stay with us be long and happy."

"Thank you, Mr.— That is— I mean—Minister Thompson. I hope I stay long—" Why didn't he lower that piercing gaze? She was making a perfect idiot of herself.

"Well, Miss Weston," returned the minister, overlooking her nervousness and glancing out the window, "you have quite an ordeal before you. Here come some of my flock. Now don't think for a minute that we profess to be angels, because we are not; we are just plain humans. We try to treat everybody right, and expect to be treated *right in return.*"

## “CATS”

The last three words he emphasized and gazed directly into her eyes. Was this a challenge? What did he think she was? Something that was coming to Eagle Nest—a wolf, perhaps—to scatter his flock from their paths of righteousness?

She stared back at him in a saucy manner, and *winked*. Why she winked she did not know; something in her just made her do it. Thompson got red in the face. Now he knew his work was cut out for him, and he made a mental note to change two or three passages in his sermon for Sunday. This girl, beautiful and innocent-looking as she was, had actually winked at him, had brazenly flirted with a minister of the gospel. And what made him angrier was the fact that he did not resent the wink and had been on the point of winking back, but had controlled himself in time.

Two of the women who were the chief instigators of the propaganda against Mollie entered just in time to catch her wink. With knowing looks they nodded solemnly to each other; just as they had supposed, a trouble maker had arrived, and she was trying her wiles on the parson, *their* parson. Well, they would save him at any cost from this woman of hell.

Thompson introduced one of the women to Mollie. “Miss Weston, I would like to have you to meet Mrs. Prudence Prouty, wife of Ephriam Prouty, owner of our largest and only general store.”

The parson, although a diplomat, was sometimes forgetful, even though he knew the individual weaknesses of his flock. With Mrs. Prouty it was wealth and social position. But he had made an awful mistake. She had requested him many times not to refer to her husband’s “Emporium” as a *general store*. And now, on this occasion of all others, when she wished to awe this painted

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

actress with her standing and position, he had forgotten. Womanlike, she vowed to get even with Mollie for his slip.

Mollie gazed at Mrs. Prouty haughtily and then smiled. Leave it to two women to understand each other at the first glance. "I am delighted to meet you, Miss Weston," purred Mrs. Prouty. "I hope you recover soon from your illness. You indeed look worn out."

Mollie felt like saying, "Meow!" but replied, instead, "Mrs. Prouty, I have never been ill in my life, but it is very *motherly* of you to be so solicitous of my health."

"Time!" exclaimed Thompson, under his breath.

He then presented the other lady. She was the leading physician's wife, and considered herself just one peg above the bourgeois of the village. The actress woman had won her first encounter with Mrs. Prouty, but now *she* was going to floor her.

After Thompson's, "Also meet Mrs. 'Doctor' Witherby," the lady in question tripped lightly to Mollie and gave her a supercilious look. "Charmed, Miss Weston," she said, "but as a *doctor's* wife, I really advise you to take a long rest, because you do *look* pale."

So this was another one. Mollie was beginning to get angry. She wished there wasn't so much at stake, so that she could let out a torrent of East Side compliments on these two women which would shock them, but the presence of the minister calmed her a little. She felt instinctively that he was on her side and was expecting her to win, but without rough methods.

"I am also *charmed* to meet you," returned she, looking coolly at Mrs. "Doctor" Witherby. "Pardon my seeming rudeness, but in my hurry on the train I left my rouge in my stateroom, hence my paleness. If you would be so kind as to let me have a little of yours, before the rest

## "CATS"

of the village society arrives, it might save me answering questions about my health. Your husband is a doctor, I presume, and I suppose a doctor's wife just naturally has to talk business. It helps the practice so much. Mental suggestion is a wonderful thing."

Thompson coughed. He was enjoying this more than anything since he had beaten up the saloon keeper.

Mrs. "Doctor" Witherby reddened through her rouge. She had prided herself that she was an artist at applying nature's camouflage. Then this woman of the city, and in front of the minister, too, had dared to insinuate that she painted. Well, it wouldn't take her long to get even. Mollie so far had made two enemies, and she knew it, but she did not care, and was prepared to make more if necessary.

Several other women entered. Thompson introduced Mollie to the druggist's wife, Mrs. Billings, who was just plain woman. "Miss Weston," she heartily greeted, after kissing Mollie, "I have been looking forward to meeting you with the greatest of pleasure. You see, it is quite an event in our little village to have a real actress among us. I know you have already received many invitations, but I want you to come to our house as soon as you get the chance, and have a sure-enough home-folks dinner, and I'll cook it myself. There's nothing stuck-up or fancy about us."

At this remark she gave a meaning look in the direction of Mrs. Prouty and the doctor's wife. They turned up their noses in return. Mollie was taken off her feet at her greeting, it was so entirely different from what she had expected.

"Mrs. Billings, I'll be over to-morrow night," she replied, turning her back to the other women. "It's a great *pleasure to meet real people*. The time I dined at the

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

home of the Governor of New York I met another woman such as you, and she was the Governor's wife."

She was lying, but she couldn't help getting back at the two cats in the corner. Mrs. Prouty and Mrs. "Doctor" Witherby pricked up their ears and smoothed back their fur. The Governor of the state of New York had invited Miss Weston to *dine* at his house. Perhaps, after all, they had made a grave mistake. Each resolved to make up to Mollie, but did not impart her resolution to the other. Even in Eagle Nest the up-to-date fashion of double-crossing was in vogue.

Thompson was greatly interested, because he had also met the Governor while studying for the ministry. He turned to ask Mollie more about him, but, luckily for her peace of mind, other people entered, and he forgot his intention during the business of introducing them.

Emily, highly elated by Mollie's two victories, served tea to the visitors. Mollie had no more tilts because the others were simply privates in the armies of the two factions. It was a close race between Mrs. Prouty and Mrs. "Doctor" Witherby as to who should command the Artificial Brigade, while Mrs. Billings for many years had commanded the Human Battalion. The privates were willing to abide by the dictates of their leaders.

During tea a pitched battle took place between the two factions. The Artificial Brigade was maneuvering to gain the advantage of taking the minister home, while the Human Battalion was waiting for them to show their front so they could outflank them.

"Of course," announced the doctor's wife to Thompson, "I will have the pleasure of taking you home. *My car* is waiting outside."

The parson was in a dilemma; he didn't wish to go home; he was waiting for the rest to leave in order to

## “CATS”

have a talk with Mollie. The girl interested him; why, he could not fathom, but, anyway, she *did* interest him.

Mrs. Billings, now that her enemy had displayed her strength, realized she was beaten so far as taking the minister home was concerned, but she determined to spike the maneuver. “The parson isn’t going home,” she exclaimed, coming to Thompson’s aid. “I bet Emily has invited him to stay to supper, and who could refuse Emily’s invitation?”

Thompson glanced quickly at Emily, hoping that she would rescue him.

“Of course he isn’t going to get out of this house without staying for supper,” retorted she, instantly taking the cue from Mrs. Billings. “Who ever heard of such a thing?”

“You see how it is,” responded the parson, in an apologetic voice. “Emily is the boss and I cannot be discourteous to my hostess, but I thank you just the same.”

Mrs. “Doctor” Witherby realized that Mrs. Billings had put one over on her, and made a mark in her futurity book.

The mention of supper caused general exclamations from the rest. “My! how the time has flown!” “Who would have thought it was so late?” “And I haven’t even got the vegetables peeled!”

They crowded around Mollie and invited her to call. All of them were sincere in asking her to call, but some determined that they were going to make it as unpleasant as possible for her, while others wished her to really enjoy their invitations.



## LIII

### CUPID GETS BUSY

WHEN they had left, Emily excused herself, saying she had to get supper ready. She wished the parson to be alone with Mollie. Since meeting her she had quickly gauged her worth, and, being somewhat of a matchmaker, she had painted a mental picture of Mollie settling down in Eagle Nest as the parson's wife.

What a triumph this would be for her! Not that she was seeking glory, but she was human, and Priscilla Winters had a way about her which sadly needed attending to. She wondered why Priscilla had not called on Mollie, but she had a suspicion that it was because her new dress had not arrived. Emily made a good guess, because Priscilla at that moment was writing to a certain dry-goods house in a way that only Priscilla could write.

Mollie now was not in the least awed at the thought of being left alone with the parson. In fact, she anticipated it with relish. She felt flirty, audacious, devilish, or whatever you may desire to call it. I suppose each girl has a special pet name for the feeling. Anyhow, Mollie felt that way.

When they were alone, Thompson moved over to a chair beside her. "Why did you wink at me?" he asked.

Taken off her guard slightly at the suddenness of the question, still she did not lose her poise. "Because it wouldn't have been just right to *kiss* you," she returned, pertly.

## CUPID GETS BUSY

Thompson flushed, not knowing whether to be angry or not, but decided quickly in the negative. He would ignore her remark, even though it was plainly evident she was trying to "guy" him. He would nip this in the bud immediately. Clearing his throat and trying to look very dignified, he commenced:

"Miss Weston—"

"My name's Mollie," she interrupted, enjoying herself hugely.

Frowning slightly, the parson commenced his speech again. "Miss *Mollie* Weston, I wish to speak to you on a serious matter. If you don't mind, will you tell me the *real* reason for your visit to Eagle Nest?"

She caught her breath. What did he know? Was his question leading to something else? It was her turn to be uncertain as to the course to pursue, but she decided as quickly as he. If he knew anything, she would make him tell it without any encouragement from her.

"Why did you call on me with a baseball in your hand, and what did you do with it afterward?" she asked, naively, sparring for time and trying to divert his thoughts. "Were you going to hit me with it?"

In spite of himself, the minister had to laugh. There was no use trying to be serious with this butterfly. Perhaps as yet she had not rubbed against the world as he had. One look at her laughing dimples was enough to see that she had never known any trouble or had been confronted with the real problems of life. He was wrong in his first surmise. There was no danger to Eagle Nest here. Instead, perhaps, it would have to be his duty to protect her from the wiles of the villagers. How such an unsophisticated dear could have been born and brought up in the wickedest city in the world without being contaminated was a miracle to him.

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

"I called on you with a baseball because I had been pitching to some youngsters," he replied, in a jocular vein. "I believe in healthy outdoor exercise, and as for the baseball, I swallowed it."

Mollie laughed gleefully. He didn't know a thing. She was right in two ways.

They conversed for nearly half an hour on commonplace things, during which time Thompson talked mostly of himself and his career and the troubles he had experienced while studying for the ministry. Anyone listening to him would have thought he was on the witness stand in defense of his character. Even though everything was said in such a way as to make an impression on Mollie, still he did not try to boost himself in the least; he simply told the truth, and the truth was a real boost for him.

Mollie was delighted with him; again she had met a different type of man. He was much stronger willed than Davis, and his ideals were pure and noble. She could learn to love him in a very short time. Unknown to herself, she loved him then. Here at last was a man she could marry and be happy with forever. Then she remembered, and a cloud passed across her horizon. It was an ominous black cloud, with yellow, sulphurous fangs which darted out like tongues of flame, scouts of the squall hiding behind it.

Emily, from the dining room, announced that supper was on the table.

Thompson assisted Mollie to rise. As his hand touched her arm she felt a firm pressure from his fingers. It sent an electric shock through her. But perhaps she was mistaken and he did not do so intentionally. The current died out at the thought.

The minister, who had unconsciously squeezed her arm just a trifle harder than was necessary, imagined he felt

## CUPID GETS BUSY

her body incline slightly toward him. A thrill passed through him, but it also died quickly when he reasoned it was impossible for such a girl to care for him, a rough country minister, and at their first meeting, too. He also reasoned she was not capable of love; it was too weighty a subject for her to attempt.

Cupid must have been having a great time.

Entering the dining room, Thompson looked at Mollie and Mollie looked at Thompson, and their gaze dropped. Emily looked at the ceiling and smiled.

That night the parson lay awake and argued pro and con, and finally judged himself a fool. The girl had only been egging him on. She was there for trouble, and in his sermon Sunday he would show her she could not fool with him. He got out of bed and for an hour scribbled footnotes on his sermon.

"God," prayed Mollie, before retiring, "if you're anything like that agent of yours, I take back everything I've said."

She tried to sleep, but a vision of a chorus girl named Floss sat at the foot of the bed and kept repeating something about not being able to marry a decent man.

## LIV

### THE SUBPOENA

**I**N New York, Davis was standing by his table, reading a note in the handwriting of the one he had too late learned to love:

DEAR JACK,—I have gone away from you and everything. I could not stand it. There will be no use to look for me, because even *you* cannot find me. Perhaps some day my body will be found. Good-by.

MOLLIE.

He raved like a wild man when he had finished reading her message. She had committed suicide! His "Dreams" had left him! He staggered to the sofa and sat down, dazed. No thought of searching for her entered his mind; the awful fact that she was gone had paralyzed his brain. Davis was a selfish man, and this made it harder for him to lose something he had just begun to realize the value of. He stumbled to the sideboard for relief. The next morning Peters came in and picked him up from the floor, undressed him and put him to bed, then removed the empty bottles.

For several days Davis drank heavily, giving no thought to his gambling, and Peters tucked away several thousand dollars in his own private bank account. Pretty soon he would have enough to open a "joint" of his own, or, better still, retire. The longer Roulette Jack remained drunk, the quicker his ambition would be realized.

## THE SUBPOENA

Rat Morgan had drifted from bad to worse. Even his friends, the "dips" and "yeggs," were getting leery of him. He was hitting the dope too much, and the first thing they knew he would be spilling everything. Furthermore, was he earning his keep of late? They decided he wasn't, and "laid off" him. Morgan was having a hard time to keep himself supplied with his magic powder and was rapidly reaching the end of his resources.

In a cell on Blackwells Island, Pete Short, in the clutches of the "white plague," was bargaining for his soul. He felt the presence of the Dark Shadow hovering above him, and he was afraid to die; the balance sheet was too much against him. But there was one good deed left which might help him. Perhaps the scales of God were out of order and his crimes would be outweighed if it were added in his favor. He was writing a letter to Mollie Eastman at the Palais Jardin, telling of the circumstances attending her mother's death. When he had finished he sealed the letter carefully and gave it to a guard to mail. It took his last half dollar to buy the favor, but he reasoned that fifty cents' worth of salvation was more to him in his present need than all the thousands he had squandered in crime.

The guard had a conscience which would not let him break prison regulations, so he destroyed the letter but kept the money.

Three days later the prison chaplain prayed mechanically over a lifeless form before it was carted away to be buried at the city's expense. Pete Short had been subpoenaed from an unfinished sentence for vagrancy, to stand trial before the Supreme Judge on graver charges.

## LV

### THE HOUSE OF GOD

**I**T was Sunday morning in Eagle Nest, and Mollie and Emily were busy getting ready for church. To Emily it was a weekly occurrence, to be looked forward to with pleasure. But to Mollie it loomed as a dreadful ordeal, because she would not know how to act, and she dared not ask Emily, because she would thus betray the fact that she had never been to church. The only course left was to try and bluff through it by observing Emily carefully. Still, there was one great reward—she would hear *him* preach. After the lapse of a couple of days she had admitted to herself, but not without a fight, that she loved the minister and loved him madly. She thought of him night and day. It was her first love.

Mollie had dressed in her best, but she did not do it to impress the others; it was for one, and one alone. If he was pleased, nothing else mattered.

Thompson also was nervously awaiting his Sunday's service, because the whole sermon had been written as a challenge to force her to display her true colors. Supposing she did not come! The disappointment would be too great. He loved Mollie, but, like all men, was ashamed to admit it to His Imperial Majesty, Himself.

Even though he was a minister of the gospel, it would appear to a close observer that God and the rest of the congregation would not have much of a look-in at this particular service.

## THE HOUSE OF GOD

When the church bell commenced ringing, Mollie was all excitement. To her it had an uncanny sound. It seemed to be calling, calling her to a mysterious something that lay just out of reach; still, there was a sweetness to the sound.

She went to the front porch and listened. The flowers bowed and smiled and beckoned, as if they, too, understood that the bell was calling her to *him*. A hummingbird darted to a flower, kissed it lightly, and then, with its happy, humming buzz, flew in the direction of the chiming bell.

In the belfry of the church, a gray-haired sexton was manfully tugging at the rope and complaining of his rheumatism, but his complaints mixed with the sounds from above and were lost.

The church at Eagle Nest was one of those barnlike frame affairs setting well back from the country road, which can easily be mistaken for a schoolhouse.

Sunday was the general visiting day for the farmers of the surrounding country, which was evidenced by the many rigs of all descriptions parked in the clearing. Of late it had been a habit for them to arrive early, because Thompson usually sat on the porch and talked things over with them—the news of the day, crops, politics, and business. He never talked religion until he stepped within the portals of the church.

Although much younger than most of them, the parson was the referee for their disputes and arguments. The final decision was left to him, and he had a happy faculty of pleasing, without toadying to either side, and, what was more important, in nearly every case his decisions later proved to be correct.

Emily had studied Eagle Nest psychology. Therefore she delayed her entrance with Mollie until the last mo-



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

ment for that unhampered walk down the aisle to her pew, which was in the second row, realizing that Mollie would be the cynosure of all eyes, and she was not going to let any of the *élite* share this attention.

Mollie, very nervous, followed Emily to the pew. She knew she was undergoing a rigid inspection from the congregation, and kept her gaze on the floor, because she dared not raise her eyes to the platform in front of her, for *he* was there. She could feel his eyes boring through her.

During the singing of the opening hymn Mollie was in her element and she was quick to avail herself of the advantage. Her voice rang out in all its sweetness, and one by one the congregation stopped singing to listen, until soon she was singing alone, except for the village choir, which, resenting the usurping of its rights, sang the louder, and suffered in consequence.

Mollie sensed that a battle was raging and sang her best. Emily could not resist the temptation to gaze around at the congregation with an "I told you so" look. Thompson, thrilled at her singing, gazed directly at her, and his act did not escape several sharp eyes in the congregation.

So far, Mollie was decidedly pleased with herself; she was getting along famously, and church was not so hard, after all; in fact, she liked it, but as yet had not mustered courage to look up at the pulpit.

"Now comes the sermon," Emily whispered to her. "He is a wonderful talker."

Thompson rose to give the text, and Mollie, inadvertently raising her eyes, gazed directly into his. With a look that penetrated her soul, he commenced speaking:

*"Be not deceived: God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap."*

Mollie realized instantly that he was talking to her

## THE HOUSE OF GOD

alone, and she trembled. What did he mean? Why didn't he speak to her so *she* could understand? If he was going to attack her, why this underhand method of using the words of another? Wasn't he man enough to come out in the open and say what he meant? Why, even the men she had met in cabarets—Davis and Donnelly, for instance—were *men*, in that they spoke their minds openly. Was this follower of God below them in this respect? Did he have to skulk behind a pulpit and stab her in the back? She returned his stare defiantly.

Thompson, by her actions, knew his first shot had gone home, but he misinterpreted the message of her eyes. To him it meant she was frightened; that he had scored. He determined not to spare her. But Thompson, like most men, understood everything else in the world but women.

The congregation settled back, the majority to listen, some to sleep, others to make careful notes of what So-and-so wore, and the remainder to replenish their store of gossip ammunition for the coming week. Mrs. Prouty, who was afflicted with a rather poor memory, was making pencil notes of Mollie's new hat on the inside page of the hymn book, and during the rest of the sermon worried herself sick trying to tear out the page without being seen.

Thompson, in a relentless voice, began his sermon. Mollie had ceased to look at him, and her eyes were fixed on the back of the pew in front of her. If this was the house of God, then she preferred the open air. To her the minister's voice sounded strange and far off, like the muttering of thunder before a gathering storm. The horizon of her future was dark and threatening. Occasionally a sentence burned into her soul, like a streak of lightning, and left a charred trail in its path. She clenched

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

her hands until the nails dug into the flesh. Emily was innocently enjoying the sermon, but it was going "over her head" completely, and the rest of the congregation did not have to duck very low to escape it.

"A person can never hide from his past. Evil committed in days gone by plants warning posts along the roadside of the future. The fastest train, the airplane, or other engines of speed made by man can never outdistance this grim pursuer."

Mollie winced. Mrs. "Doctor" Witherby roused suddenly from her reverie. What did the parson mean by his last remark? Was he hitting at her? Had some one been telling him things? For a few minutes she was quite worried, then settled down to her plans for the coming party she was going to give. Should she invite this Weston creature? That was the problem.

"Truth is the conqueror of deceit and subterfuge. Living a lie is telling a lie—" Mollie bit her lips; it was torture for her, and she trembled with the fear of being found out. Then at some softer passage in his sermon she determined to later confide in him, to tell him all, and throw herself upon his mercy. But her resolve was shattered immediately by another lightning stroke, and she boiled with rage. Then she resorted to the expedient of trying not to listen, but the words burned in and compelled the attention of her mind; there was no escape for her. She soon reached the conclusion that Thompson must know of her past life and had taken this mean, underhand way of telling her. He had painted her as a bad woman; all right, she would be a bad woman as far as he was concerned, and would test *his* wonderful faith and religion.

It would be a hard fight, because she had been pitted against the world without the advantage of God's teach-

## THE HOUSE OF GOD

ings and had failed, while he was fully equipped with these teachings and was in partnership with God; therefore if he failed there was no one to blame but himself. He was so free with his beautiful advice to others, and how they should act, but time would tell. She was interrupted in her thoughts by Thompson's closing words, "Let us pray."

Mollie bowed her head with the rest and "prayed": "O God, I guess I don't fit in with your crowd, and I won't try to butt in farther. But I am going to be good in my own way, except toward that parson of yours. He will have to take his chance so far as I am concerned."

The organ commenced playing, and the ushers started their silent rounds with the collection plates.

"What are they going to do with the money?" whispered Mollie to Emily.

"Why, that helps pay the expenses of the church and the parson's salary," answered Emily, surprised, "and if there's any left over, the poor heathen in Africa get it."

This put a different phase on the whole matter. So he was getting paid for his lovely advice, and his great thoughts were figured in dollars and cents. When the plate was passed to Mollie she sarcastically dropped a ten-dollar bill into it, and looked up at Thompson quickly with a smile. He smiled in return. Perhaps if she had given a fifty-dollar bill he would have kissed her. So this was his game, was it?

When the service was over Emily and Mollie passed down the crowded aisles. Everyone seemed to be talking at once. When they reached the door the parson was there, shaking hands with the members of his congregation as they left. It came Mollie's turn. He extended his hand, but she ignored it and gave him a sneering look. Thompson flushed, but recovered himself quickly. "Good

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

morning, Miss Weston," he said, in such a loud voice that she had to return his greeting. She was so angry she could have slapped him.

Mollie was soon the center of attention and was introduced to everyone of "importance." Mrs. Prouty was doing the honors because she wanted to get a closer view of Mollie's hat to see how the ribbon in front was fixed.

## LVI

### UTOPIA

THAT night Thompson communed with himself. Had he made a mistake? He had won his victory, but how hollow had been the reward. Even if she were bad and would prove to be an evil influence among his congregation, still he could not help loving her. What was this mysterious power that drew him to her? He saw by her actions at the church door that she was offended, and the fact hurt him. For hours he pondered the whole situation, and then concluded that he would have a talk with her and be friends. But then the constantly recurring doubt arose, if she had nothing to hide, why had she taken offense at his sermon? Then the image of her beautiful and trusting face would appear and he *knew* it was impossible for her to do wrong.

Mollie was also battling with herself. Now that she was alone and her temper had somewhat cooled, her plan of vengeance against the minister did not appeal, as she reviewed it carefully. After all; he was right and she was not fit to mix with decent folks; but perhaps if the truth were known a good many of them would be worse than she. But one fact remained, which even she could not dispute—she loved him, so nothing else mattered.

Three long, weary days passed without her seeing him, then, unable to bear it longer, on the afternoon of the fourth day she surrendered and wrote a note asking him

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

to call, but she did not possess the courage to have it delivered.

She was in the front garden, weeding the flower beds and fighting with herself, when a voice from the front gate startled her. "Good evening, Miss Weston." Electrified, Mollie sprang to her feet, scarcely able to believe the evidence of her ears. The minister was leaning on the gate, smiling at her. She almost ran to meet him.

"Won't you come in and have supper with us?" she asked, shaking hands with him. "I've been wondering what has kept you away?"

Thompson thrilled; so she had buried the hatchet. Well, he was not going to be the one to dig it up.

"That's just what I came for," he returned, joyously, "to have supper with Emily and you. I very often drop in this way, unannounced."

"Emily! Oh, Emily!" called Mollie, excitedly, in the direction of the cottage.

"Well, it's about time you showed up!" exclaimed Emily from the front porch. "What's been the matter?"

"Been awfully busy since Sunday, Emily," excused the parson, coloring slightly.

"Perhaps Miss Winters has kept you busy," retorted Emily, pointing her finger at him.

A pang of jealousy shot through Mollie, but Thompson's reply reassured her. "No; you're wrong, Emily. I haven't even seen Miss Winters."

By this time Emily had reached the gate and, getting him by the arm, drew him toward the house; but he did not need much urging. Mollie excused herself for a minute; then, going to her room, took a note from the top drawer and tore it into small pieces. As she did so her heart warmed at the knowledge that he had come to her

## UTOPIA

first. Thompson stayed until half past nine, a late hour for Eagle Nest.

That night Mollie was happy, and so was Thompson.

The weeks passed, and Mollie, her status firmly established by the parson's indorsement, with very few exceptions had become a general favorite. The villagers were busy gossiping about the possibility of the parson marrying her. Priscilla Winters, wisely recognizing defeat before it arrived, had transferred her attentions to the postmaster's son, and the village winked.

Thompson had fallen hopelessly in love with Mollie, but was afraid to risk asking her to marry him. The way things were he was happy, but if she ever said no his peace of mind would be wrecked forever, so he drifted happily on.

The two were together constantly, and made many trips to the sick and the poor. Naturally generous, Mollie spent her money lavishly, with no thought for the future. Why should she think of the future? She was happy, and her past life in New York was gradually becoming unreal, something that had never existed, and she had gladly cast it from her mind. Her love for the minister had woven a spell about her and the world appeared in a new light; it was good to live. One night she knelt at her bedside and prayed: "O God, forgive me for what I've said to you. I did not know. I am now trying my best to do right, and if I am wrong, just stop me in anything that you don't approve of. I won't mind. Amen."



## LVII

### ANTONIO FELUCCI

**A**NTONIO FELUCCI was a painter, and his canvas was his life. Eighteen hours out of the twenty-four he spent in front of his easel in a dusty city studio. Sometimes he went days with just a meal or two, not because he was unable to buy food, but because he loved his art and could not spare the time to eat. Antonio was well endowed with money, a fond aunt in Italy having died and left him burdened with an immense fortune.

He had never exhibited a canvas to the public because as yet he had not painted one which had attained his idea of perfection. His real inspiration had not come to him, so he lived and dreamed of the time when his canvas would be the talk of the world and would hang beside the great masters of yesterday. Dreaming and dreaming, he neglected his health, until one day a great specialist advised him that his dreams would never be realized if he died.

Antonio saw the wisdom of this and, acting on his doctor's advice, packed his paints and brushes and departed for the mountains, to see if the air of the pines would save his weakened lungs. Dissatisfied, he traveled from place to place in search of an inspiration, but it always eluded him. His lungs, not being artistic, were vulgar enough to improve.

One day in his travels Antonio arrived at Eagle Nest, but, not being able to speak English very well, the vil-

## ANTONIO FELUCCI

lagers decided that he was impossible, and he smiled to himself. It is not always wise to speak English when one wishes to be alone. Every day, with his tubes of paint, he made trips into the woods, but returned at night-fall with a blank piece of canvas. His inspiration was still elusive.

One afternoon, Mollie, happy and care free, visited one of her sick patients, to take the baby, which was her favorite, for an airing. Weeks before, during her rambles, she had stumbled accidentally upon a beautiful spot in the woods where an immense boulder, scarcely a stone's throw from the roadside, made a wonderful seat, affording her an expansive view of the beautiful valley below. The rock was sheltered by a bower of green leaves, and a little stream at its base rippled musically over the stones. This was Mollie's favorite retreat when she wished to be alone, she having not confided its whereabouts even to Thompson. She journeyed there to commune with the flowers and the birds, and many a loving message she intrusted to the trickling stream to carry to her loved one.

This afternoon she reclined on her rocky throne with the baby in her lap, and sang a soft, crooning lullaby. Even the birds hushed their chirping to listen and the south wind swayed the branches gently in approval. She was alone, and she was singing to heaven, to her mother, and to *him*.

Not far away, Antonio, the painter, was tapping his brush idly against the easel he had set up in the woods. The landscape, as beautiful as it was, did not appeal to him; he desired something living, breathing, pulsating with life, something that would live on his canvas for hundreds of years, for eternity.

Disappointed in his search, he had about reached the conclusion that it would be wiser for him to return to

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

New York, to try models again. But their hearts were not in their work; they posed for the money there was in it. How could he paint a girl when in her heart she was thinking of ham and eggs and hoping he would hurry and get through with her? In contempt he shrugged his shoulders in his Latin way, as if it could not be helped and there was no other course left to him.

With a sigh of resignation, he was beginning to pack his equipment when the first notes of Mollie's lullaby reached him through the trees. He stopped, spellbound, to listen, then gazed about curiously. If he could only paint that voice. Cautiously tiptoeing in the direction of the singing, as if afraid the breaking of a twig would frighten the singer away, he peered through the screen of leaves and saw Mollie sitting on the rock. Here at last was what he had searched the earth for; he had found his inspiration. He hurriedly but silently retraced his steps to get his materials, for time was precious and he must not waste a second. Returning, he inadvertently stumbled on a weather-eaten branch which made a sharp cracking sound as it broke. The singing ceased suddenly. Realizing that he was discovered, Antonio stepped into view and, removing his hat, bowed very low.

"Pardon me for disturbing your beautiful song," he apologized.

Although startled at the painter's sudden appearance, Mollie regained her composure when she recognized Antonio. "You did not disturb me," said she.

Without replying, Antonio studied her minutely; if she would only consent to pose for him his fame would be assured. Clearing his throat twice, he advanced toward her hesitatingly, bowing at each step.

"Madam," he entreated, his voice trembling from suppressed eagerness, "if you will pose for me I will be so

## ANTONIO FELUCCI

grateful, and it will not take much of your valuable time." He paused and, cocking his head to one side, exclaimed: "Just hold the child a little closer. Ah! it is perfect!"

His request granted, he backed slowly away from Mollie and examined her critically from different angles. His actions were so grotesque that she could scarcely refrain from laughing. Delirious with delight, he ran toward his easel and, in his hurry, tripped over a vine and sprawled on the ground, kicking over his materials. This was too much for Mollie, and she laughed heartily, but as he looked up from the wreck she saw the pained expression on his face and realized she had hurt his feelings.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" she stammered, in sympathy. "I didn't mean to—"

"Ah, it is beautiful!" he interrupted, excitedly. "Hold it, that expression. It is magnificent; it is glorious!" Then, quickly picking up his paints and brushes, he rearranged his easel.

Mollie sat an hour and a half for him, and promised to be there at the same time the next day.

## LVIII

### THE STORM

FOR the following three weeks Mollie's life was bliss. She was as happy and care free as a child. The world had changed suddenly into fairyland, and she was queen of the fairies, wielding the magic wand of love which had transposed everything by its mystic touch into sunshine and flowers. Even rainy days, when things were gray and gloomy, had no dampening effect on her spirits. Her all-powerful scepter converted the raindrops into sparkling diamonds, and the muddy roads into golden-paved avenues leading to *him*. Nothing had occurred between Thompson and her to mar, not even for a second, their happiness in the presence of each other. To the worldly wise it was apparent this condition could not last, but to them it led on into eternity.

Antonio had kept Mollie to her promise, and had taken advantage of her good nature by having her sit for him on every sunny day, excepting Sundays. He had coaxed her untiringly to pose on the Sabbath, arguing that God was also an artist and would approve, but to no avail; although she saw no wrong in it, still she knew her minister would not approve, therefore it was out of the question.

Thompson was very much interested in the portrait, but Antonio would let no one see it, not even Mollie. When they coaxed him, he answered, with a shrug of his

## THE STORM

shoulders. "When the painting is finished, ah, that is different. Then the world shall gaze upon it, but now not even the beautiful lady herself shall look. God does not open the buds before it is time for them to greet the sun. It is His art."

This settled all argument.

One day Antonio was missing from Eagle Nest, but, unaware of his departure, Mollie, as usual, at the appointed time, arrived at her rock to pose for him. Heretofore he had always been waiting for her. In surprise she climbed to her place and found a rose, with a note in Antonio's handwriting attached to it. Picking it up in wonder, she read:

Beautiful lady, Antonio Felucci has gone forever, but his heart remains with you. I love you, but know you cannot be mine; still, I have painted your image on my heart and canvas and shall always worship at its shrine. Though I have gone, you shall hear of me, the world shall hear from Antonio Felucci, and shall worship your face and Felucci's art.

At the knowledge that he had gone out of her life Mollie experienced a pang of genuine regret. Next to her minister, Antonio was the best man she had met. Her first impulse was to show the note to Thompson, but she hesitated. Would it be fair to Antonio? He had bared his heart and soul to her, and to him his love was sacred. She resolved to respect this sacredness and tore the note into tiny pieces, and the rippling stream soon carried them away.

The next day her resolve not to tell of Antonio's love worried her considerably. Weakening, with downcast eyes, she confessed to Thompson.

"Mollie," he answered, laughingly, "you could not deceive me if you wished; it is not in you."

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

She winced at his faith in her. If he only knew!

Several days after the departure of Antonio, Thompson mustered courage and, while walking from church, asked her, in a voice tremulous with emotion, "Mollie, when are you going to marry me?"

"Westley," returned she, walking a few steps in silence, "I am going to marry you when your love becomes so great that *nothing* will matter, and that time has not arrived." Although her heart was beating wildly, still her voice was calm.

Thompson made no reply, and they walked slowly home, both thinking hard. His proposal had brought the terrible past back to Mollie, and her reply had made him realize that there was a mysterious something standing between them.

Reaching the gate to the cottage, Thompson stopped, then in a husky voice he whispered, "Mollie, the time *has* arrived, and I am ready to *prove* it."

With a face the color of chalk she looked into his eyes. "Even to the extent of defying the teachings of your God?" she asked.

Without replying, Thompson bowed his head, then, turning on his heel, walked slowly from her.

"Westley!" she cried.

At her agonizing cry he hesitated; then, love conquering, he wheeled about and came back to her.

"Oh, Westley," she begged, "I didn't know what I was saying! Don't leave me this way. Don't leave me, Westley; don't leave me."

"Would to God that I were strong enough to leave you, Mollie, if the path of right pointed from you," faltered he, clasping her hands tightly in his, "but I fear that I am weak."

Gently withdrawing her hands from his tightening grip,

## THE STORM

she ran sobbing toward the house. His look had frightened her; she had seen it before in the eyes of drunken men. What was she to do? She looked back over her shoulder, but all she saw was his back as he disappeared down the street.

At this moment Emily appeared on the front porch. She had been invited by Hannah to spend the week end at the hotel, and was waiting for Old Bill to stop by with his team to pick her up. Mollie smothered her emotion and, unseen by Emily, hastily wiped her eyes, then stooped over one of the flower beds as if she were weeding it.

"Right on time!" exclaimed Emily, as she saw a team turn the corner. "And he's got Hannah with him."

Without effort of the driver, Old Bill's horses stopped in front of the gate, it being part of their routine when they visited Eagle Nest.

"Come on there, Buttermilk!" called Old Bill to Emily. "Hannah's waitin' for you, and these hosses ain't relishin' pullin' her all them eight miles."

"I wish't you'd stop makin' a fool outen yourself, Bill," retorted Hannah, sharply, as she poked him in the ribs.

At the sound of the old man's voice Mollie, trying hard to compose herself, went to the gate, followed closely by Emily.

After a hearty greeting, Old Bill bantered her about the minister. With every remark of his stabbing her to the heart, she smiled bravely in return. As Emily, assisted by Mollie, climbed into the wagon, Old Bill surveyed the sky.

"Guess we'll have to hustle," he remarked. "Wind's from the east, and it looks pretty much like a storm was comin'." Suiting his action to his words, he tightened on the reins and clucked to his team.

"I expect to be home Monday night, dear," Emily



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

called to Mollie as the wagon started on its journey. "You won't be afraid, will you?"

Kissing her hand to them, Mollie assured her that she would not, and watched the receding wagon until it disappeared.

As the wagon passed down the street Old Bill waved to the parson, who was sitting on his front porch. Thompson stared at the wagon, and then waved back. *Mollie was alone!* The thought burned into his brain. Fighting hard against temptation, he retreated into the house, thinking thus to evade the thought. *Mollie was alone!* Picking up a book at random, he tried to concentrate, but in letters of fire across the page he read, "*Mollie is alone.*" He threw the book from him and, quitting the house, walked hurriedly in the opposite direction from the Stevens cottage. After having gone about a mile a drop of rain splashed on his cheek and he stared at the sky, which now was of an inky color. Large raindrops pattered around him, but, turning up his collar, he continued aimlessly on his way.

Without warning, a streak of forked lightning parted the blackness of the heavens, instantaneously followed by a deafening crash of thunder. In the rift he read, "*Mollie is alone!*" The trees were bending double from the wind, and he could scarcely see in front of him, it was so dark. The minister lowered his head as he staggered forward against the wind and rain, and was soon soaked to the skin, but he kept on *away* from the Stevens cottage.

Mollie, frightened by the lightning, crouched in her room, alone with her thoughts. Should she marry him without telling of her past? A crash of thunder, and she shivered. Should she take him from his God? The room lighted with an intense glare as an electric bolt rent the sky, followed by a thundering report which shook the

## THE STORM

house to its very foundations. Mollie was terrified. Was God answering her? Was He angry? Why didn't He kill her if He wanted to? She wasn't afraid to die. Another flash of lightning, and a terrified exclamation gave the lie to her bravado as she ran to the bed and covered her head with the pillows.

Faltering through the barrage of God's artillery, Thompson, in the darkness, ran into a tree which had fallen across the road, and cut a gash in his forehead. Stunned by the blow, he sank weakly to his knees in the mud, and then crumpled to the ground. The blood ran into his eyes, but the kindly rain soon washed it out. Gradually he regained his senses and staggered to his feet. Where was he? Oh yes, he was in the woods, and *Mollie was alone*. At the thought his brain caught fire and he pushed on, but this time in the direction of the Stevens cottage.

Although the thunder and lightning had ceased, the rain was beating against the window panes of Mollie's room. Ashamed of her fright, she rose from the bed, turned up the lamp, and peered at the clock. It was nearly midnight. After undressing and getting into her nightgown, she thought she heard a noise outside her window, and her blood froze. But perhaps she was mistaken. No, she could hear footsteps on the gravel path. She trembled and waited. Who could be calling in this terrible storm and at so late an hour? Had something happened to Westley? was her first thought. A knock on the front door. But was it a knock? It sounded as if some one had fallen against it.

Holding the lamp above her head, she moved to the door, but, suddenly remembering that she had nothing on but her nightgown, she retraced her steps quickly and threw a wrap around her. Some one was pounding on the door. She went to it and opened it. The inrush of

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

wind and rain blew out the light, and Mollie, with a cry of terror, retreated through the dark hall.

"Mollie, it is I," called a thick, raspy voice from out of the blackness. "It is Westley."

Her breath coming in gasps, she returned to the door, and it took all her strength to close it against the storm. Then, getting a match, she lighted the lamp and, placing it on the hat-rack, stared in front of her.

Leaning against the wall was Thompson, his hair matted from the rain and a tuft hanging over his forehead, the loose ends mingling with a thin trickle of blood running from a cut on his brow. His eyes were bloodshot and glowed like fire. Mollie screamed and rushed to him. Stepping to meet her, he caught her in his arms and drew her close to his drenched body and kissed her madly on the mouth, neck, and eyes. In fright she fought to get away from him, but he tightened his grip. Frantic, she eluded his grasp by a sudden twist and, panting from her efforts, leaned against the wall.

In the struggle her wrap had fallen, and her silk nightgown, now wet from the contact with Thompson's dripping clothes, clung tightly to her body.

He stared back at her and laughed like a madman. "I've come to prove that nothing matters except my love for you," he said, hoarsely.

"Westley," she faltered, advancing a step nearer, "you don't have to prove it to me. Now listen to reason and go home and get those wet clothes off. You'll be sick."

Without warning he sprang forward and again caught her in his arms. He was breathing hard and his hot breath burned her neck. With a grip of steel he lifted her and carried her to her room, which was dark, except for the rays from the lamp in the hall shining through the open door. This time Mollie did not resist; it was too

## THE STORM

wonderful, this being in his arms. She nestled closer and his wet clothes felt warm and comfortable. Nothing mattered to her now, except that he loved her and she loved him, and who could come between them?

Weakened from the blow on his head, the minister staggered under her weight, tripped over a chair, and they both fell to the floor. Mollie came to her senses instantly. What was she doing? She did not care for herself, but her Westley should not thus be sacrificed.

Rising weakly from the floor, Thompson groped around until he reached a chair, and then sank into it. Mollie watched him with staring eyes. Was this her Westley, her minister, the one who had preached to her from the pulpit? Impossible! It could not be.

The light of reason was dawning in Thompson's eyes. Rubbing his forehead wearily, his hand soon became covered with blood from the cut on his brow. Drawing it back, he gazed at the stains uncomprehendingly, and then smiled faintly at Mollie in an interrogative way. Slipping into a closet, she put on a kimono, then, going to the washstand, poured some water into a basin and with the wet end of a towel bathed his wound. The cut, although not deep, was very painful and the forehead was bruised and swollen. "Now tell me all about it, Westley dear," she soothed.

At her words he stared into her face, blinking his eyes, then, reaching forward suddenly, he grasped her by the wrists. "Mollie, I am mad!" exclaimed he. "Crazy! I want you, Mollie, I want you!" and again his eyes burned with that look she did not like to see.

"Westley, I am going to save you in spite of yourself, because you do not know what you are doing."

He clung to her helplessly without answering. Despite her words, her will was weakening and she longed to

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

return the pressure of his arms and to forget everything. Then the thought of the consequences to him rushed over her again and she battled for the right.

"Westley, I am going to tell you all, even though it separates us forever, but it is for your sake. Will you listen until I'm through? Promise me."

He bowed his head doggedly in consent. To Mollie this was the end of it all. Her face was drawn and haggard as her dream of happiness was becoming a horrible nightmare. Twice she attempted to speak, but her love said no and it was beyond her strength to do so. She would try to persuade him to leave; it was her only chance to save her happiness. Perhaps something might turn up in the future which would wipe out the past and he would never have to know.

"Westley," said she, her soul in her eyes, "if you love me, and if you respect me enough to ask me to marry you, why are you here—in my bedroom—after midnight?"

As he stared at her vacantly his eyes grew moist. Kissing her on the forehead, he staggered to his feet. "O God!" he exclaimed in a broken voice, "what have I done?" Without looking back, he stumbled into the hall, and she heard the front door close behind him.

"O God, I thank you!" she prayed, then crumpled into a heap on the floor.

The next day the village was agog with excitement. Their parson had been found unconscious on the porch of his home, and Doctor Witherby had said that a severe attack of brain fever was threatened.

## LIX

### THE AFTERMATH

**T**HROUGH the tender care of Mollie and Emily, Thompson slowly regained his strength, but during his convalescence he failed to refer to the night of the storm.

Mollie was glad, because she had determined it should be buried with the other corpses in the cemetery of the past. Her decision had been reached while sitting at his bedside, watching him toss and moan in delirium. But she could not understand God, His ways were so erratic. Thompson had preached that God was responsible for everything. If so, why had He caused that terrible storm and compelled him to wander through it until he had hurt his head so badly against the tree that he did not know what he was doing? And now God was punishing him for an attempted wrong that God Himself had been responsible for. Or had the whole thing been a test, a tryout, of herself? Had God given her this chance to make good? Impossible! God would never injure one of His devoted servants just to see if an outsider was good enough to enter His fold. If He did do this, what was the use of being devoted to Him if you had to suffer for it? And another thing, if God was all powerful and knew everything, why did He have to do these things to find out? If God were so good, why did He put temptation before *His* believers? It was too much for her and

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

she gave up in despair. Although she longed to believe in God, desired it with her whole heart, still she could not understand why He made it so hard for her?

Thompson also was having his fight. He realized that, instead of the strong man he prided himself in being, he was weaker than the weakest member of his fold. He had been teaching others how to withstand temptation, and at the very first temptation of his life he had failed miserably in the sight of God. And it had rested with a mere woman, one whom he had been afraid would contaminate his congregation, it had rested with her to show him the way, he, a minister of the doctrine of God. He was humbled before himself. The incidents of the night of the storm burned themselves into his brain, never to be forgotten, and Mollie's words rang constantly in his ears, "Westley, if you *love* me, and if you *respect* me enough to ask me to marry you, why are you here, in my bedroom, after midnight?"

Why, indeed, had he been there? It was because his love had not been pure; it was the love of the body, not of the soul, and he was a minister, and supposedly a disciple of the Right. Shame gnawed at his heart. But he would make amends; from then on his love would be of the purest; he would show her he could be trusted and that he was worthy of her.

But then her other words insisted on being heard, "Westley, I am going to tell you all, even though it separates us forever," and pangs of jealousy and suspicion shot through him, and his noble resolves were forgotten. What had she done to prevent their marriage? Was she, after all, a bad woman? If so, why had she dissuaded him from his purpose on the night of the storm? Was she playing a game, was her goodness only a pretense?

Then he remembered. What right had he to expect

## THE AFTERMATH

goodness from her when in her eyes he had proved himself a beast? No matter how deep in sin she may have been in the past, still she had stood the test, and he had failed. He would marry her, no matter what her past had been. Who was he, to judge?

Mollie had also made a resolution. She was going to tell him everything as soon as he was well enough to listen, and then leave Eagle Nest forever. She never doubted that when he learned of her relations with Davis he would spurn her. True, he had proved to her that he was as weak as other men, but would he realize this himself and forgive her transgressions of the past?

The time slipped by until one September afternoon Thompson, who had been out of bed for a few days, but who was still too weak to resume his work, was walking with Mollie. He leaned on her arm and she felt proud that she could help him. Arriving at the rock where she had posed for her portrait, she spread out her shawl and they sat down. In silence they gazed at the beautiful valley stretching far below them.

Thompson was breathing deeply of the crisp mountain air and the red blood was again coursing through his veins. It was good to live. He glanced at Mollie. She was beautiful, alive, human, throbbing, a fit match for the surrounding scenery of God, and he had dared to attempt to desecrate this wonderful specimen of God's handiwork. Mortified, he lowered his gaze until it rested on the ground in front of him.

Mollie had brought him to the rock to tell him of her past, hoping that perhaps, after all, he would understand. She touched him gently on the arm, but he started guiltily and looked away. He knew what was coming; she was going to ask him why he had insulted her on the night of the storm.



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

But it was hard for Mollie to begin, because she was gambling—gambling her life's happiness against the understanding of a man. The stakes were great, but the risk was greater. A scene from the past flashed before her. She saw the face of Jim Curtis, flushed and eager, on his last night in the gambling hell, his eyes following the wildly spinning silver ball of the roulette wheel. His happiness and honor had depended on the flight of that racing metal sphere. She wondered if now her face also appeared flushed and eager, because she was gambling bigger stakes than Curtis had ever dreamed; she was gambling her love, a woman's all.

"Westley," she faltered, in a voice that quavered despite her effort to make it calm, "I have something to tell you, something that is terrible, something that may separate us forever."

He moved closer and held her hand, but said nothing.

"Deep down in my heart I do not want to tell you," she continued, "but I think it only just to you, and just to me, and just to your God."

He peered far into the valley below, and the sun was going down. It meant that Mollie was going out of his life. She was his sun, but she must never set. Why should he care about her past? It was unchangeable; it could only be repented for. Only the future counted. Anyway, he was not fit to judge; there was One higher than he, and that One should be the judge.

"Mollie," he answered, "if you are undecided, why not take time to think it over first? I do not care to know. You are everything to me, and I can only judge you from the time I first met you. If there is something in your past, why not ask God to decide for you? Seek comfort in Him and let Him guide you."

At his answer her heart throbbed madly. Perhaps if

## THE AFTERMATH

she left it for God to decide, she would be saved. Later she would have a talk with Him, but He could not decide everything. She wished the minister to decide just one thing, something that she must know his views on.

"There is something I want your *opinion* on, Westley, and please answer me from your heart." Then she lied; she could not help it. "And, Westley, please believe me, I am not speaking about myself."

A pressure of her hand was his consent.

"If a girl lived with a man whom she loved," she continued, "or thought she loved at the time, is she free to marry another man?" Mollie could scarcely breathe while waiting for his reply.

Faint and dizzy, but bracing himself, the minister gazed into space and thought deeply. So this was her secret? He was hurt, his heart was dead, he was sinking; then he grasped at a straw, "I am not speaking about myself." The straw changed to a raft and he was saved. How could he have doubted her? She was good; she could not be otherwise.

"Mollie," he answered, slowly, "that girl can never marry while the man still lives."

So this was his decision. While Davis was living she would never be able to marry him. His answer had lifted a great load from her mind; he had not condemned the girl to hell fire and damnation. There still remained a chance for her. Perhaps Davis would die, and deep in her soul she hoped he would. Perhaps that night she would ask God to kill him.

They thus sat, busy with their thoughts, until the wind commenced to blow cold. Then Mollie helped Thompson to his feet and, wrapping the shawl around his shoulders, they strolled homeward.

*Mollie had reached her final decision and her plans were*

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

laid. She would ask the help of God, but would allow Him a time limit, and then, if He had not solved the problem, she would marry her minister and take the consequences. But, she reasoned, there would be no consequences, because no possible link remained to connect her with her past; Eagle Nest was too far out of the way.

In her bedroom that night she prayed, but did not kneel. It was to be a face-to-face affair. She would put her cards on the table and gamble with God. She would give Him two months to do as He saw fit, and then, if nothing happened, she was going to do as *she* saw fit.

"Dear God, Westley has asked me to trust in you, and I'm going to, but so far you haven't done much for me. When I was a kid you took my mother away, and have never let me know what became of her. Then you took Mrs. Henderson. Then you let me be fooled by Davis. Then you sent me out here and made me fall in love with your minister, only to have my heart broken. So you see there isn't much in your favor on my balance sheet. I am not trying to double-cross Westley, and I'm not exactly asking you to help me deceive him. But what he doesn't know about some things won't hurt him and will hurt me. You see what I mean. This is the first week in September. Well, on the first week in November your time will be up. For two months I'll do nothing; I'll leave everything in your hands. I want to be good and I want to go to heaven, if there is such a place. Tomorrow I'll promise Westley that I'll marry him the first week in November, and I will, too, if I go to hell for it. So, dear God, we understand each other, don't we?" And she went to bed to dream that she was to marry Westley and that God had brought it about in his own way.

The next morning she was happy. Her troubles had disappeared. She had great faith in her contract with

## THE AFTERMATH

God and believed he would fix everything for her. Perhaps her dream of the night before had something to do with her optimism. As she helped Emily with the housework she sang with joy, and Emily's face brightened because it had been long since she had heard her sing.

"What's the parson been saying to you?" she asked, winking at Mollie. "Did you name the day?"

Mollie desperately took her first plunge, and the water was not cold. "This is a secret, Emily dear. Westley and I are to be married the first week in November."

With a shout of joy Emily chased her around the table and, by a quick maneuver, caught her. "Now you just tell me what he said when you named the day?" she demanded.

For a second Mollie was stumped. "He was speechless with delight," she answered, finally.

"And well he ought to be," replied Emily, "to get a girl like you after you have turned all them city fellers down."

The two women dropped their household implements and went into a corner for a confidential chat. There is no way of recording what was said, for no man, as yet, has been admitted to one of those sacred councils.

That afternoon Mollie again went with Thompson for his daily constitutional. At the rock she told him she would marry him the first week in November. He drew her to him and kissed her on the forehead. He was happy, and so was she. Then she commenced planning their home, but he told her he had it all figured out.

"Who helped you?" she asked, sharply, in sudden jealousy. "Priscilla?"

Thompson kissed her laughingly, but this time on the lips. They sat holding hands, oblivious to the world, because they had just created a new one of their own.

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

A freckled face with a look of boyish disgust on it withdrew from a break in the foliage. "And that's the guy what told me it was wicked to go fishin' on Sunday, and look at him! You can't trust none of 'em."

With this bit of soliloquy, he picked up his fishing pole and a can of worms and followed the creek downstream.

## LX

### "THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS"

ANTONIO FELUCCI had finished his masterpiece. His friend, the specialist, not being an artist, told him the work on the picture had cost him a lung. But Antonio did not care. He could use the other until it gave out, and then— He shrugged his shoulders.

But his specialist friend, when he gazed at the canvas, opened his eyes in amazement. "It may have cost you your lung, Antonio," he exclaimed, in rapture, "but even at that you got it at half price."

Antonio's eyes glowed; here, indeed, was the highest praise, because he knew the specialist considered a lung above everything.

The famous doctor, giving the lie to his valuation of lungs, lighted a cigarette and, inhaling deeply, meditatively blew the smoke through his nose. "What are you going to call it?" he asked.

"Ah," returned Antonio, flushing with pride, "my friend is interested; it is good. The masterpiece shall be called 'The Madonna of the Hills.'"

"A corking title, Tony," whistled the doctor, "a corker. Who was your model?"

"The Madonna herself," answered Antonio, crossing himself.

The specialist, in wonder, looked from the canvas to him, but said nothing. Perhaps Antonio did not need

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

a lung specialist; he would call in Doctor Sawyer, who dealt with hallucinations.

In response to his invitations to view his canvas, Antonio's studio was crowded with artist friends and critics. They gazed and admired, and came back and gazed again, and then separated into little groups, and talked in low whispers, while Antonio passed around little goblets of red wine which matched the color of his hectic cheeks. He knew the signs. They were pleased. This day was worth forty lungs. Two of the largest dealers came over to him and intimated if the price was reasonable they would buy, but Antonio gazed at them in scorn. No money could buy "The Madonna of the Hills," but they could look and admire and worship for nothing.

The dealers left him, saying to themselves: "Perhaps I went at him in the wrong way. To-morrow I will bring cash. It is a masterpiece and should win a place in the Academy.

But when the morrow came Antonio was still obstinate and refused their money. But that made no difference to them. They understood artists; sooner or later he would sell. But they did not understand Antonio and his love. "The Madonna of the Hills" would be placed on exhibition. He was made; he was a famous painter. His name would be spoken in awe by the coming generations of young painters, and they would copy his "Madonna" and show it to their teachers for approval, as he had done in Florence, in Paris, and in Munich. His lung was missing. Bah! What was a lung when weighed with art?

## LXI

### THE GRINNING HEAD

**L**UCK had gone against Davis after Mollie's desertion. Commissioner Ferguson, true to his word, had closed him up, and when Davis had threatened him with exposure he had laughed in his face and warned him to lay very low or else he would spend a few years up the Hudson with some of his friends. Wilson, the commissioner's secretary, had severed his allegiance to Davis when things were breaking badly and had made a clean breast to Ferguson, careful, however, to shield himself. When Davis had been closed up the judge chuckled to himself and wrote a letter to Nannette, who had not stayed "up the river" very long. Through his efforts she had been released quietly and, at his expense, was living in retirement. But as yet it would be too dangerous to flaunt Davis openly, even if he was on the "skids," because he had too much "on" him.

Nannette answered, thanking him for his thoughtfulness, but, still loving Davis, she longed for the time to come when he would be deposed from his power completely so that he would have to turn to her for help. She wanted him to fall from his pedestal so she could place him back on it, but first he must suffer for double-crossing her, and then they would both attend to the judge.

Mulvaney had drifted lower and lower and was now



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

in the power of the drug which had ruined Johnny Muldoon's life. Queer are the ways of fate. The pill box of cocaine which he had put in his pocket the night after Johnny's confession in the police station had done the trick. Mulvaney had taken part of its contents to make him sleep. He had slept and had dreamed, and had taken more, and then more, until now there was no crime he would stop at to procure the drug. Davis had thrown him over, and Mulvaney was living by grafting "hush" money from the smaller fry who were still in his power from knowledge gained while on the Force.

Rat Morgan was a pitiable wreck of a man. Having developed rapid consumption, his days were numbered, and he realized it. Down and out, he lived in the saloons, stealing his meals from free-lunch counters. Rotgut whisky had joined forces with cocaine and had burned his insides to a crisp. Occasionally he was lucky enough to rob a drunk, and a few days of bliss with his drug would follow, but when the cocaine gave out his bliss turned into periods of hell. Twice he had been sent to the city hospital, a raving madman, but the kind-hearted nurses had helped him, and when discharged he had carried out a supply of his staff of life.

The face of Jake, the newsdealer he had killed years before, was always before him—just a head floating in the air. Morgan after a while had accepted Jake's head as a friend and conversed with it by the hour, and the derelicts of the Bowery, hearing him, with the forefingers of their right hands made circles in the air to indicate wheels, and smiled knowingly.

When Jake's head smiled, Morgan smiled with it, but of late it seldom smiled, except when there was an abundance of the life-giving drug. Twice Morgan had met Davis accidentally and had implored him for relief, but

## THE GRINNING HEAD

"his only answer was, "Find Mollie Eastman and you can have all the money and dope you want."

Once the Rat, after "frisking" a drunk, had reinforced his nerve with cocaine and whisky, and had cunningly framed a story about the whereabouts of Mollie which in his estimation was holeproof, but Davis had picked flaws in it, and the Rat, in consequence, had suffered for weeks from a broken rib.

When he had recovered, craving for cocaine, in desperation he told Davis about seeing Mollie at the railroad station, but Davis was drunk and laughed at him, and threatened this time to break all of his ribs, so the Rat returned in despair to his bench in the park and dreamed of the time when he would revenge himself. Soon another face had appeared with the grinning head. It was Mollie. When under the influence of his drug he worshiped at her shrine and pined for the time when he would walk, hand in hand with her, into happy and glorious fairyland. During these spells the grinning head of Jake disappeared, but as the effects of the drug wore off, Mollie's face faded, only to be replaced by the angry head of Jake; but it would not be grinning, and it was getting closer, ever closer to his throat.

Eagle Nest was all bustle and excitement, for Mollie and Thompson had announced their engagement. Mollie was happy at last. God was surely "coming through." Twice she had been tempted sorely to take her mother's picture from its hiding place, but had held back because, in her opinion, God was very erratic; but as the days slipped by without marring her happiness, her faith increased and she prayed, "Dear God, I thank you," and waited eagerly for the morrow.

Thompson and she had enthusiastically commenced furnishing their future home, and in consequence many

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

trips were made to the railroad station at Minton to get articles which had been shipped from mail-order houses. Once a package had been received from a New York house, and Mollie shuddered as she read the name of the metropolis, but her fears had disappeared quickly. She was safe. She was free. And she was happy, because God was now her partner and would see her through. Her faith had become strong.

One day, as she and the minister were driving past the veranda of the Palace Hotel, a face from out of the past peered at her. Her heart stopped beating and she clutched at her side with pain. Fortunately, Thompson was looking the other way. Deathly white, she gazed back into the staring eyes. It was Jim Curtis, but he was smiling and he had his arm about a girl. It was Grace. Without removing her eyes from his, Mollie shook her head for him not to recognize her. Would he understand? A look of bewilderment clouded his face, but then he smiled and in return nodded twice. He had understood and was repaying his debt to her. Curtis, with his bride, was passing through Minton on his way to the inviting West, where the lights of Broadway never twinkled.

But he had ruined Mollie's peace. He loomed as a danger signal from the past, a semaphore upon which was inscribed, "It cannot be."

Once again, her faith shaken, she communed with God, and trembled as she beseeched: "O God, you're not going to throw me *down* now, are you? Is this your answer to me? Is it a warning that I must not be happy? God, dear God, you're not going to double-cross me after letting me be so happy, are you? Please don't, dear God, please don't."

She cried herself to sleep, but the next morning, when she woke, her faith was stronger than it had been before.

## THE GRINNING HEAD

She was following Thompson's advice, "If your faith is strong enough, God will perform what to you will appear as miracles." But her faith had not reached that strength, because for the next week she studiously avoided the hotel and the station.

Emily was as busy as a bee, helping her get ready, and time sped quickly until there were only three days left of the time she had allotted to God. The air was beginning to bite, and an occasional flurry of snow gave warning that soon the hills would be clothed in a shroud of white. The crisp, biting air quickened the blood in the veins of the lovers. They were happy and God was good. There was but one more trip to be made to the station before the wedding. Thompson had to secure the marriage license. Mollie dreaded the ordeal, because she knew that under oath she would have to lie, and when God found out that she had sworn to a lie what would he do?

## LXII

### THE NOTEBOOK

THE "Madonna of the Hills," living up to the expectations of Antonio, was the nine-day wonder of the art world. Newspapers and magazines sang its praises, and one of the largest New York papers issued a front-page facsimile in colors on its Sunday art supplement. Antonio Felucci was famous and proudly wore the crown of his achievement. He refused fabulous offers for "The Madonna of the Hills" from the vulgar rich, who wished to buy the painting, not because they appreciated art, but because it would be bandied around the clubs that they had put something over on the rest of the vulgar rich.

Davis, his eyes red and bleary from the preceding night's debauch, reached for the Sunday paper. He wished to look up the entries for Monday's races. In the past he had scorned "the horses" as an investment, but now he "ran a book" and accepted bets as low as five dollars from the "pikers." When his gambling establishment had been closed, the balance in his favor was small. His financial condition had come as a sudden and awful shock to him, but he could trust Peters, so far as figures went, and he had to grin and bear it. Peters laid low for a while, and then embarked for his fatherland, where he lived in luxury and honest contentment for the rest of his life.

As Davis picked up the paper, the art supplement

## THE NOTEBOOK

dropped into his lap. With a curse, he reached to throw it away, but was petrified as he gazed into a face his very soul longed for. It was "Dreams" staring at him from the printed sheet. Incredulous, he rubbed his hand across his forehead. He could not believe it. "Dreams," his "Dreams" was alive. Holding the paper from him as if it were a ghost, he staggered to the sideboard, filled a tumbler with whisky, and drank nearly half of it. The alcohol steadied his nerves. Frantically he kissed the face on the art supplement and burst out crying, which soon changed into hysterical laughter. Dropping the paper on the floor, he clapped his hands in glee; then, picking it up again, he smothered it with drunken kisses. The face of Mollie seemed to shrink from the alcoholic breath. The whisky temporarily clearing his brain, he searched eagerly through the paper, but all he could discover was the name of Antonio Felucci. He would go and see him and demand to know where the picture was painted and what had become of his "Dreams." Perhaps he would have to kill the "wop"; if so, it would be a great pleasure. Perhaps "Dreams" had teamed up with him? At the thought he moaned and paced up and down like a caged beast. Passing the sideboard, with one sweep of his arm he knocked the glasses to the floor, where they broke into hundreds of pieces.

In rage he jumped on the broken glass, and with his heels ground it into the expensive carpet, laughing like one crazed. Suddenly, his mood changing, he cursed her until even his Satanic Majesty smiled in approval. He vowed vengeance on her; he would make her suffer for the pain she had caused him. He would find her and bring her back and love her and torture her, according to his moods. She should never escape him again. Reaching for the whisky bottle, he held it to his lips until he choked.

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Clasping the newspaper in his arms, he staggered to the bed and threw himself full length upon it, whining, in a maudlin voice: "My Dreams, you ain't going to leave me, sweetheart, are you? Jack's talking to you, Dreams. Jack's going to be with you to-night, Dreams." Then, pointing to himself, he added, "This is Jack; yes, it is." Placing the paper under his head, he fell into a drunken stupor.

Meanwhile another scene was being enacted in the back room of a Bowery saloon. Rat Morgan was just coming out of one of his trips to "heaven" and was feeling the pangs of the want of cocaine. Mollie's face was fading into the blackness, and the grinning, leering, hideous face of the murdered newsman was becoming plainer and plainer and closer and closer. The Rat cowered as the image grew nearer, while his nerveless hands groped aimlessly on the dirty, beer-scented table in front of him. A newsboy entered and called into the barroom, "Here's your paper, Mike!"

"All right, kid," returned an Irish voice. "Put it on one o' thim tables. I'm busy now." It was Sunday, but Mike paid for protection and was permitted to sell drinks. The receiver of the graft imagined he squared himself with God by dropping part of the money into the collection plate.

The newsboy, with a grin, threw the newspaper in front of the Rat, who waved his shaky hand in thanks. The boy, in contempt, sticking his thumb to his nose, backed out of the door. He wasn't accepting thanks from bums on the Bowery, and especially not on Sunday.

Mechanically drawing the paper toward him, the Rat stared at it vacantly. He didn't care for papers; they had ceased to interest him, but his gaze focused gradually on the picture of Mollie.

## THE NOTEBOOK

"That's funny," he muttered. "Where's Jake's face? It's his turn now, because Mollie just left. Jake's off schedule."

He lifted the paper in wonder, his foggy brain refusing to clear; then, mystified, he held the paper at arm's length, but still the face of his queen stared back at him. This was unusual and should be investigated immediately. With anxious fingers he felt nervously in his vest pocket, and his face brightened as the searching fingers came in contact with some loose change. He hammered on the table until the bartender appeared, and then ordered whisky.

Returning, he placed a glass three quarters full of rotgut on the table in front of Morgan, and, taking a nickel from his shaking hand, observed the paper at his elbow and took possession of it; but the Rat protested in a weak voice:

"Let me look at it, Mike."

"All right," answered Mike, "but don't get it mussed up, 'cause the missus 'll raise hell."

The Rat drank the whisky at a gulp, and the alcohol warmed his emaciated body. With the reaction he realized that it was not a vision, but was a reproduction of Mollie's face. At the knowledge his craving for cocaine, with its cunning, came to the fore. Craftily gazing around and seeing Mike busy in the front room, he slipped the art supplement under his ragged, dirty coat and tiptoed noiselessly out the side entrance. He wished to be alone with his Mollie, so he could think. Perhaps the picture meant money for cocaine. He wended his way cautiously down the street, carefully avoiding the corner policeman, because he was "on the outs" with the police in the neighborhood. They were familiar with his criminal record and were waiting for him to make a false move.



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

so that they could make a "pinch." There was no possibility of getting graft out of him, because he was down and out; therefore it was plainly their duty to protect the city which paid their salaries.

Walking or, rather, stumbling, for three blocks, Morgan turned into a dingy doorway, over which hung a sign "Rooms Fifteen Cents, Gentlemen Only." Even the Bowery has its sense of humor. Painfully climbing the long flight of steps, he entered the "lobby" of the "hotel"—a sitting room crowded with derelicts like himself. On his entrance the majority of the heads in the room lifted mechanically, numerous eyes gazed for an instant in his direction, and then dropped. To them he was of no interest; he was one of themselves. Even in derelicts of the Bowery there is always hope that some day something will happen; but it never does, until the city claims its dead, one by one.

Seldom, if ever, a funeral is seen on the Bowery; the derelicts just disappear, and nobody misses them and nobody cares, not even themselves.

Morgan went to the desk. The "clerk," a dirty, unshaven man, looked up and handed him a key attached to a large circular brass disk. "To-day's the last day," he warned. "No more tick."

Receiving the key without comment, and still hugging the precious paper under his coat, he climbed another flight of stairs into an evil-smelling passageway, on each side of which were many numbered, stall-like rooms, about four and a half feet wide by eight feet long. The walls of the rooms were eight feet high and at the top were covered by a wire netting similar to that used on chicken coops. It was to prevent light-fingered guests from climbing over the top and "going through" the sleeping or drunken inmates.

## THE NOTEBOOK

As Morgan, in the uncertain light, stumbled down the passageway to his "room," heavy snores were heard on each side of him, interspersed with an occasional cursing request that he take off his shoes and make less noise. Another voice, probably that of the jester of the hotel, shouted, "Don't you do it; keep 'em on." This caused a laugh from those who were wide awake, and more cursing from those who were trying to sleep.

The Rat entered his room, and then, by instinct, locked the door on the inside. Once he had neglected this precaution and, falling asleep, had lost his shoes and eighty cents in money. By the light from a flickering gas jet he scanned the picture eagerly. It was indeed his Mollie. But the craving was on him; he had to have cocaine, and now was the time to use his brain before he entered into the hell of suffering which, from long experience, he knew was before him. He would have to act quickly.

Painstakingly he perused the paper, but could find no useful information. He knew it was out of the question for *him*, a ragged bum, to get Mollie's address from the artist. Spurred on by his distress, his memory was beginning to function; somewhere in the past he had gained information, but when was it? Where was it? Ah yes, his little book! Eagerly searching the inside pocket of his coat, he brought forth a ragged and dog-eared notebook from which the cover was hanging by a thread. The scene at the railroad station long ago flashed before his eyes. Wetting his finger, he rapidly turned back the pages, covered with queer hieroglyphics, until he found the desired notation: "Through ticket to Minton. Train 47, Track 19, Pennsylvania Station. Mollie Eastman. Davis might pay."

Glowing with satisfaction, he searched his clothes and found twenty-five cents. He would have to get shaved

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

before seeing Davis. That was easy—five cents, even if it was Sunday. Ten cents for car fare, or should he gamble on not needing car fare to get back? He decided not. There would be a dime left for two “jolts” of whisky; he would need them to brace him for his encounter with Davis. Then he considered a moment. Supposing the gambler wasn’t in? It would mean a useless expenditure for car fare. He would telephone; it was a good investment. Going to the corner drug store, he did so, but received no answer. Cursing the operator, he hung up the receiver. Later he would try again.

From the drug store he proceeded to a barber shop located in a damp cellar beneath a “kosher” meat store, and, after waiting his turn, got a five-cent shave, minus bay rum and powder, but plus three cuts; but as these were free it didn’t matter. Usually he received five or six nicks, so it was a good omen; luck was evidently with him. Entering a saloon where a drunken sailor was “blowing” the house, the Rat “horned in” on four drinks before the bartender got wise and gave him the “bum’s rush.” After his forcible ejection he returned to his hotel, but gave no thought to eating; it would never do to squander his money for food when he needed booze.

Later in the evening he telephoned again, but again received no answer. He tried desperately to save his remaining money for car fare and telephoning, but the craving was too great and he spent it for whisky.

## LXIII

### THE RAT SEES A WAY

**T**HE next morning he was up early in order to catch the working crowd. They had not been "worked" by him for several weeks, so ought to be ripe for a "touch." After many refusals, he successfully "panhandled" fifteen cents from a hard-working cash girl. This was enough for one telephone call, one drink of whisky, care fare to Davis, and a gamble on walking back. After calling a number eagerly, a thick voice answered him over the phone. It was Davis, and he told him to come right up. The Rat almost ran to the Brooklyn Bridge subway station. A blue-coated denizen of the law, who had been observing his begging, rapped his night stick on the stone pavement to attract the attention of a policeman at the entrance, so as to intercept him. But the Rat, long familiar with the method, darted into the surging crowd and safely made his get-away.

Davis was waiting for him, but his drunk of the night before had put him in a frightful humor, and in addition his head was splitting from a headache. He readily guessed why the Rat had called; it was to inform him that he had seen Mollie's picture in the paper, and he, Davis, was prepared to give him the beating of his life for his trouble. This time he would break more than his ribs.

Morgan shuffled into the apartment, but hovered close to the door; nothing would ever induce him to let Davis

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

get between him and his retreat. It had happened before, and the Rat still carried souvenirs of the occasion on his body.

Davis looked up at his entrance. "Well," he snarled "and what do *you* want?"

Morgan, with the craving for cocaine growing every second more poignant, felt himself sinking rapidly. He must hurry.

"How much will you give me if I tip you off where Mollie Eastman is?" he quavered.

"A straight tip gets a hundred bucks, and a phony one gets you— Well, you've had 'em before," returned Davis, a trifle hopeful, but with a hard glint in his eye.

"This ain't no phony," whined the Rat. "On the level, Chief, I got it right here in me notebook. Mislaidd the book or I'd 'a' told you long before."

He did not care to remind Davis that he had tried to tell him before, but had received a beating for his pains.

"Let's see the book," commanded Davis, with a cunning smile. Morgan, with just as much cunning, but minus the smile, handed the book to him. As soon as Davis got his hands on the book he made a swing at the Rat, but missed. "Now get out of here," he ordered.

"Better try to read it, Chief," commented Morgan, nonchalantly, ignoring the poorly aimed blow. "I'm the only guy who can translate that dope."

With a curse, Davis tossed the book back to him "All right," said he, "you win. Let's have it."

"Just put the money on the bookcase here, Chief," trembled the cocaine fiend, "so's I'll know that I'll get it."

The gambler grudgingly placed some bills on the bookcase as requested. Awhile back he would not have stooped so low as to try to cheat a person out of such a trifling amount, but things had changed materially since then.

## THE RAT SEES A WAY

Morgan repeated the notation from the book, while Davis jotted it down carefully on a scrap of paper. After months of cruel waiting he was at last on the trail of his "Dreams." Once again he would crush her in his arms and kiss her—and also beat her. His revenge would be even sweeter than his love.

With this thought in mind, he nodded to the Rat, who grabbed the money eagerly from the bookcase and hurried away. One hundred dollars! It was a fortune. He lost no time in securing a plentiful supply of cocaine, and heavenly bliss once more was his.

Afraid of wasting a minute, Davis telephoned "Information" at the Pennsylvania Station and was informed a train to Minton was leaving at midnight.

He secured reservations and, with love and revenge fighting in his heart, waited impatiently for train time to commence his westward journey in search of his "Dreams."

After "cocking up," the Rat saw the whole affair from a different viewpoint. What a fool he had been; he had lost his Mollie, because she would never forgive him for selling her to Davis. In despair, he reasoned that she didn't belong to Davis, she was his property, and determined that Davis shouldn't have her. The cocaine, supplying false courage, spurred him on in his resolve to double-cross the common enemy. Intent on his purpose, he engaged a seventy-five-cent room at a better-grade hotel, arguing that the expense was warranted because he could now afford to splurge. From there he proceeded to a cheap second-hand clothing store, and purchased a complete outfit which cost him nearly twenty dollars, but he didn't care; he was "snowbound," with unlimited capital.

Loaded down with bundles, he returned to his room and lay down on the bed to dream of Mollie, but Jake's head

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

insisted on obtruding into the picture. Somewhere there was a break in the schedule, because Jake was acting queerly. This had been twice in the last few hours that he had broken precedent. Jake should be smiling, but, instead, he was scowling, and a huge cut was beginning to show on his forehead. It was where he had killed him with the heavy metal paper weight. Then Mollie's face appeared, but she was not smiling; she showed plainly she was in distress, and Jake was scowling at her. Why? He tossed on his bed and moaned. Was his wonder drug failing him? He took a little more, but, instead of helping, things got worse. The blood was now running down from the cut in Jake's head and was dripping into space. He could hear the drops splash as they hit the floor. Then Mollie commenced crying and Jake got nearer than he had ever been before.

The Rat endeavored desperately to solve the problem. How could he make her smile and at the same time appease Jake? What had he done to incur his enmity? Of course he had killed him, but hadn't they, long before, reached an agreement in reference to that? Hadn't he promised Jake that he would take his place with the dead and let him come back to life? And Jake had agreed, but of late he was getting insistent that it was his turn to live.

The solution came to his drug-crazed brain in a flash. Jake was angry because he was letting Davis have Mollie. That was it; Jake was in love with Mollie, because their heads had been together so much of late, and he wanted her for his own. She was alive and Jake wished to live in order to be nearer to her. That was the reason; Jake desired to change places with him. All right, he could have his wish; he could live, but Mollie should never live with him.

## THE RAT SEES A WAY

The Rat saw it all; his course of action lay before him like an open book. Why not double-cross Jake by killing Mollie? And then, by killing himself, he could change places with him. Mollie would be dead and so would he, and they would be together forever, and Jake would be left out in the cold with the living. Reaching this decision, he looked to Mollie for approval, and her face was smiling. She had agreed with him and was waiting for him to put his plan in execution. The longer he pondered the more enthusiastic he became. His scheme would also double-cross Davis. By killing Mollie, Davis would be left living and would thus be separated from her. Therefore it was up to him to change places with Jake by killing himself immediately after sending Mollie to the Great Beyond. He dared not kill Davis, no matter how much he desired, because he was afraid of him, alive or dead.

As his plan matured, he sat up exultantly in bed and laughed long and loudly, until the exertion brought on a fit of coughing which tore and racked his lungs; but he did not feel the pain, his magic powder attended to that. He wiped the back of his hand across his lips, and there were flecks of blood on it. Staring at the blood, the Rat crowed with delight. Perhaps, after all, he would not have to use the knife on himself. The knife! Where was his friend? Rising from the bed, he searched a dilapidated suitcase which he had brought with him from the other hotel, and, peering cautiously around, took out something wrapped carefully in newspaper. This he untied as if it were some priceless object. It was a dirk with a six-inch blade. Returning to the bed, he pressed the knife to his bosom as if fondling a baby, and crooned a lullaby to it. It was the instrument through which he would gain Mollie and double-cross Jake and Davis. The world *was bright again*, and Mollie was smiling, and Jake's head



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

was getting fainter and fainter in the darkness. Satisfied, he lay down on the bed to gloat at his cleverness. But suddenly, with a shriek, he sat up. What was he doing here, and Davis out there after Mollie? Supposing he should take her away, how was he going to find her? The Rat jumped from the bed and hurriedly changed clothes; he must get to Mollie before Davis reached her, or all would be lost. Returning the dirk to its sheath, he placed it in the inside pocket of his coat, next to his precious notebook.

At a certain drug store, after giving the sign, he bought an additional supply of cocaine, and hastened to the Pennsylvania Railroad Station. The price of the ticket to Minton took his breath away, but he paid it, even if there would be only a few dollars left. How was he coming back? But then he remembered that his return journey would not cost money. He and Mollie were going to change places with Jake; they were going to the land of the dead.

While passing through the entrance to Track 19, a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder. Startled, the Rat turned around and met the gaze of a "bull" from headquarters. He was "pinched." The detective motioned him to one side. "What's the game?" he asked. "Why are you jumpin' the Big Town? Guess I'll have to frisk you on suspicion."

Morgan thought rapidly. If he let the detective search him he would find the precious knife and his noble scheme would come to naught. Perhaps a five-dollar bill would do the trick. Sighing, he fumbled in his trousers pocket. "This ain't no get-away," he whined. "I'm goin' straight. Been straight for the last six months. Salvation Army did it," he added, to strengthen his assertion.

## THE RAT SEES A WAY

The detective smiled sarcastically. "Away, away!" he sneered, out of the corner of his mouth.

Morgan saw it was no use trying to talk him out of it, and the train was leaving in a few minutes, so he must hurry. "There's five," he said, slipping a folded bill into the hand of the plain-clothes man. "I 'ain't got no more. Do you want it?"

"All right," returned the detective, palming the bill. "This time I'll let you off, but if you pull any rough stuff, look out."

Morgan walked away as if he had just said good-by to a friend, and entered the gate to the train.

Once on board, he peered nervously from the window, checking the passengers as they hurried along the platform, to ascertain if there were any more plain-clothes men on his trail. Why didn't the train pull out? His nerves were on edge. He pressed the dirk in his pocket, and it comforted him. Suddenly Davis passed within a foot of the window, and Morgan, seeing him, cowered out of sight, but leered with satisfaction. So far Mollie was safe, and it would be an even race for her.

Sneaking into the vestibule of the day coach, he watched Davis enter a Pullman; then returning to his seat, he muttered: "Sleep on your soft pillows, but you sleep alone, while I have company. Mollie and Jake are with me." The face of Mollie smiled from the back of the seat in front of him, while Jake, with the cut still bleeding, leered from across the aisle.

## LXIV

### OLD BILL TELLS A LIE

**A**T Minton, Davis got off the train and looked around, then whistled with satisfaction. It indeed was a tank town, and it should not take him long to find "Dreams"—an hour, perhaps. But it was best to be cautious in his inquiries, because there was no telling how many friends she had made; or perhaps she was married. This last thought had never entered his mind before and it worried him greatly.

As Davis alighted at the station, a form dropped quietly from the rear platform of a day coach and was quickly lost from sight behind a dead freight on a siding. It was the Rat, and he was playing it safe. He imagined himself an Indian, and, bending low, he sneaked from behind the freight and approached the station. Just before getting off the train he had taken an extra-heavy "shot"; consequently his nerves and muscles were tingling with life and vitality, and his brain was as clear as crystal. Darting from one hiding place to another, unseen he reached the rear of the station; then, screened by the frame building, he cautiously approached near enough to hear any conversation that might ensue. He was an Indian and he was after scalps.

The station agent was busily engaged inspecting the baggage which had been dropped from the train, while Davis, unobserved, was sizing him up. This fellow certainly should know if Mollie lived there.

## OLD BILL TELLS A LIE

The agent picked up a parcel marked, "Miss Mollie Weston, Eagle Nest." "Guess this must be the gal that's goin' to marry the parson," he said to himself. "They say she's right smart when it comes to looks."

He was interrupted by Davis, who, approaching, had touched him on the shoulder.

"What kin I do for you, stranger?" he asked.

"Do you know whether Mollie Eastman lives in Minton?" inquired Davis, his voice trembling slightly.

The agent pursed up his lips and thought deeply. "There ain't nobody around here that I knows of by that name," he answered, squinting at the questioner, "but I 'ain't been here long. Ask Old Bill Driggs over there, the fellow a leanin' again' that wagin; he's been here his whole life, and then some."

Davis thanked him and walked in the direction indicated.

The agent again busied himself with the baggage. "That's kinder funny," he mumbled. "Mollie Eastman, an' here's a package fer a gal called Mollie Weston. Well, I reckon it's only a matter of direction." He smiled at his joke as he sorted the parcels.

Mollie and Thompson were returning from the town hall with their marriage license. They were as happy as two school kids going to the circus.

The minister had several matters of importance to attend to, so Mollie suggested that she drive to the Palace Hotel and see Hannah, and then stop at the station for a package she was expecting, and on her way back pick him up. He pursed up his lips as if to kiss her, but in mock dismay she drew back.

"You mustn't kiss me in public," she warned. "Remember, we are not married yet and you are a parson."

"I know we are not married, but we will be to-morrow," he replied as he climbed out of the rig.

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Mollie squeezed his hand lovingly. God certainly had been good to her. She gently jerked the reins and the horse moved with a plodding gait in the direction of the hotel. Turning several times, she waved to the minister, who was still watching her from the middle of the road.

Several of the villagers were observing them amusedly. "I wonder if a year from now they'll be so darned anxious to wave at each other?" inquired the village grouch, of no one in particular. There was no reply; they were all married and an answer would have been superfluous.

Mollie arrived at the hotel and Hannah came out to meet her, and once again there took place one of those confidential chats between women from which men are excluded.

A suspicion was entering Davis's mind that perhaps, after all, Rat Morgan had double-crossed him. Had he made a fool of himself by coming to Minton on the word of a "dope"? He should have investigated carefully before leaving New York; a telegram to the Minton postmaster would have done the trick. Well, if the Rat had put one over on him, he would croak him when he returned to New York.

As he approached Old Bill, the Rat crouched forward to listen. Old Bill gave Davis a hostile look; he did not like the sporty way in which he was dressed, and when Davis got closer he smelled whisky, and he hated whisky. Even at his hotel he had never let a drop go over the bar. This was one of the many reasons which had kept him from making money out of his hotel; there was no magnet to draw the people. Schwartz, at the end of the town, was cleaning up in the liquor business. but Old Bill did not care.

"Say, sport!" said Davis, in a patronizing tone. (Old

## OLD BILL TELLS A LIE

Bill disliked being called "sport.") "I'm looking for information, and I want to know if there's anybody living around here by the name of Mollie Eastman." Noticing the vacant look on the old man's face, he reached into his pocket and, drawing out a newspaper, held it so that "The Madonna of the Hills" met his gaze.

Davis was also looking at the paper and did not notice Old Bill's start of surprise, but the Rat saw it and smiled.

The old man was in a quandary. It was Molly Weston, all right, but what did this disreputable man want with her? She was too good and pure a girl to have anything to do with him, and, anyway, she was to be married to the parson and he had been invited to the wedding. No, sir! This loudly dressed stranger from the city was not there for any good purpose, and if he could steer him away he was going to do it.

Old Bill was religious, very much so, but he believed that sometimes a lie will do good. He had his own notions of right and lived up to them.

Taking the paper from Davis, he held it in front of his face so as not to betray his emotion. "That's a purty nice picture, stranger," he remarked, casually, after a long scrutiny. "Who is it, some city actress?"

Davis cursed audibly. "No, it ain't the picture of a city actress," he replied. "It's the picture of the girl I'm looking for; it's Mollie Eastman. Did you ever see her?"

Handing back the paper to Davis, he took off his specs, folded them carefully, inserted them into their case, and slowly and painstakingly put them in his pocket. He was sparring for time to think out an answer. To him, telling even a righteous lie was hard work.

"Look here, mister," he answered, finally. "I'm sixty-seven years old and was born and raised in this town, and I own the only hotels hereabouts, the Palace Hotel and

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

the Hotel Palace. And more 'n that, I've met every train for years, and nobody by the name of Mollie Eastman 'ain't ever arrived. Perhaps you made a mistake in the name o' the town. There's a *Minden* about two hundred miles up the line, and the last train leaves for there in about"—he took out his watch and looked at it—"in about fourteen minutes. You must o' sure got mixed in the names."

Davis, with a curt, "Thanks," left Old Bill and purchased a ticket for Minden, cursing his ill luck.

The Rat gloated with satisfaction; the old man had put one over on the mighty Davis.

Chuckling to himself, Old Bill climbed into his wagon. He had been delegated by Hannah to get Mollie and Thompson and bring them home to supper. At an unusual sharp jerk on the reins, the team started down the road: they were not used to being hurried, and resented it.

## LXV

### MOLLIE DECIDES

**I**T was becoming dark as Davis paced up and down the platform impatiently, waiting for the train to Minden.

At the hotel, Mollie, delayed longer than she had anticipated, accepted Hannah's invitation to supper, and drove to the station to get her package before picking up Thompson in the village.

Just as she arrived the train for Minden came in with a rush. Davis hurried to catch it, but he dropped his ticket and a gust of wind blew it across the platform. Twice the fluttering pasteboard eluded his foot, and he had just about decided to give up the chase when the ticket, caught in a contrary eddy of wind, came to repose against the front wheel of a buggy at the edge of the platform. With a curse, Davis stooped to recover it, and as he rose with the ticket clutched firmly in his fingers he gazed squarely into the frightened eyes of his "Dreams."

They stared at each other, speechless with surprise.

The Rat, peering from around the corner of the building, tightening his grip on the hilt, drew the dirk slowly from his inside pocket and crouched ready to spring. His hour of triumph had arrived. He and Mollie would soon walk hand and hand into eternity. He swayed his body sideways, gathering momentum for his rush, like a panther before it pounces on its prey; then the cunning of his drug-crazed brain whispered, "It's too dangerous while Davis is there—he might spoil it all. Get her alone."



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

and make sure." The Rat sighed and sheathed his dirk, but bent forward so as not to lose a word of their conversation.

Davis was the first to recover from the shock. But, now that he had her, his love retreated in favor of his revenge. The white face before him invoked no pity or sympathy in his heart; she should suffer. She had double-crossed him, deserted him, and had caused him pain. And she had dared to do this to Davis, her master!

Edging to the rig, he raised his face close to hers. "So I have found you at last!" he snarled. Mollie did not answer; she was petrified from fright. "You pulled out and left a note saying you were going to commit suicide, didn't you?" continued Davis. "Double-crossed me, huh? It would have been well for you if you had killed yourself, because you're going to get yours. Now get this. There's a train leaving for New York at six to-morrow morning, and I'm going to buy two tickets, and one of them is for you."

Mollie's breath was coming in short gasps. God had failed her at the last moment. She kept staring at Davis, hardly able to believe her senses; then in desperation she closed her eyes and prayed aloud: "O God, don't fail me now! Save me, dear God, save me!"

"Sniveling to God, are you?" sneered Davis. "Well, He's not in on this deal. I'm cutting the deck, and *Davis* is the one to pray to, not God."

The Rat shivered all over. Far back in his boyhood he remembered a time when he used to pray to God at his mother's knee, but that was long before she had turned Him down for booze.

Davis's sacrilegious words gave Mollie new strength. God certainly could not be on his side after his insulting remarks. Perhaps He was still on hers. She would appeal to the gambler, and God might soften his heart and send

## MOLLIE DECIDES

him back to New York, because hadn't Westley said that if her faith was strong enough God would perform miracles? And this would indeed be a miracle.

Clutching the wagon seat, she leaned nearer, her soul in her eyes. "Jack, won't you let me alone? I am happy out here, and I'm living a good life, and"—the tears rolled down her cheeks—"and—and, Jack—I am to be married to-morrow, and I love him. He is the minister— We are so—"

"Married?" interrupted Davis.

His voice sounded softer and her heart quickened. Perhaps God *was* going to perform a miracle.

"Yes, yes," she answered, eagerly. "Yes, we are to be married; everything's ready—and, Jack, he thinks—thinks—that I am good. It will break his heart to know the truth. Oh, Jack, won't you please go back? You can get lots of other girls. You don't need me—you don't want me. I can't go back to that—that life—again. And, Jack—I don't love you—and never can—"

Davis lowered his head and stared at the spokes of the wheel, so as to hide the sneer on his face. Let her ramble on; he was getting valuable information and she was arming him with a weapon that he could use to force her to return with him. She loved this country minister madly—he could see that with half an eye—therefore, he reasoned, she would sacrifice anything to keep him from knowing the truth.

Misinterpreting his action as a sign of relenting, hope was born in her heart. "Jack, I've over four thousand dollars you can have; you can take it back with you. Jack, for my sake—will you go back to New York and forget me? Oh, please, Jack!" she implored.

The Rat reached for his knife.

Looking up at her until his half-closed eyes resembled slits in his face, Davis hissed in a venomous voice: "For-

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

get you, hell! You're going back to-morrow morning with me. You can disappear quietly and your rube minister will always think you've been good, but if you are not here to catch that New York train, do you know what I'll do? Well, I'll stick in this town and expose you, and then you'll have to leave, because they'll drive you out."

At his reply, Mollie lost control of herself, and her anger flared up. "Jack Davis," she threatened, "if you do, I'll kill you, so help me God!"

The libertine laughed in her face. "You've heard what I said, and you know I never four-flush. Will you be here, or not?" he asked, then added, "And don't forget the four thousand; it'll come in handy."

Mollie realized she was beaten, and her soul wilted. There was no use to struggle against fate any longer. God had failed her, but there was still a way open; she could kill herself and perhaps be happy with her mother and Mrs. Henderson. Then, sooner or later, Westley would join her and in some quiet corner of heaven she could explain everything to him. But if suicides were sent to hell, she would be no worse off than she was now.

"All right, you win," she returned, her face white and drawn. "I'll be here, and on time."

At her words the Rat ran his thumb along the edge of his knife. It was sharp enough.

Davis's heart beat faster; he had bluffed her into it. "I knew you would come through, Dreams," he replied, softly. She shuddered at the old familiar name. "But," he continued, "remember, if you don't show up, the minister gets an earful. I'll be waiting for you."

He turned on his heel and walked away. Mollie stared after him, but it was so dark she could scarcely see her hand in front of her, then, mechanically lifting the reins from her lap, she drove to meet her lover.

## LXVI

### "HERE COMES THE BRIDE"

**T**HE Rat, clutching the knife firmly, stepped cautiously from his hiding place. This was his chance. She was alone and it was dark. Stooping low, he ran until he came within a few feet of the receding buggy, but his lungs were hurting him and he had to pause to recover his breath. Which would be the better way? Should he climb in from the back and stab her from the rear, or should he, on some pretext, stop her, so that he could talk to her in life before they started on their journey together? Jake had told him the dead could talk, but perhaps Jake had lied, so that he wouldn't mind changing places with him.

Unable to reach a decision, he trailed the rig down the road. But it was getting into the lighted section of the town; he must hurry. Stooping low, he sneaked noiselessly up to the tailboard and was climbing into the buggy, when his dirk, catching in his clothing, fell to the soft dirt of the road. Cursing under his breath, he dropped quietly to the ground and felt around in the darkness for his knife. After an exasperating delay he found it, but the wagon had emerged into the rays of the lights from the store windows. A violent fit of coughing attacked him and blood from his lungs oozed between his fingers as he tightly pressed his hand to his mouth to smother the noise.

Mollie pulled up in front of the drug store and alighted.

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

She was calm and composed, having thought out her course of action during the ride from the station.

The druggist welcomed her with a smile as she entered. Smiling bravely in return, she purchased several small articles in order to disguise her real errand. "Oh yes, I almost forgot," she added, almost too casually. "Emily Stevens has a horrible earache, and she asked me to get her some laudanum, quite a lot, please."

The druggist complied with her request, and as she left the store he remarked to one of his customers who was standing near, "Ain't that just like Emily, getting an earache before a wedding?" The man addressed agreed that it was.

Climbing to her seat in the rig, she secreted the bottle in her bosom; it was her deliverance. Then, sighing deeply, she resumed her search for the minister.

The Rat, who had been watching from the other side of the road, followed cautiously, availing himself of each protecting shadow.

Thompson was conversing with Old Bill as Mollie drove up. The old man, seeing her first, commenced singing in a loud voice, "Here comes the bride, here comes the bride," and then laughed heartily. Thompson blushed as several of the bystanders clapped their hands in approval. Mollie's face was the color of chalk, but the merciful darkness hid her pallor.

The minister seated himself beside his bride-to-be and, placing an arm around her waist, with the other he drove in the direction of the hotel.

Old Bill, giving them a chance to get well ahead (once he had been young), climbed into his wagon and followed slowly.

The Rat cursed as he kept close behind the lovers. Would his chance never come?

## **"HERE COMES THE BRIDE"**

Once Old Bill imagined he saw a shadowy form far ahead of him, but dismissed the thought, blaming it on his failing eyesight.

At the station Davis lighted a cigar and paced back and forth impatiently. The night air was becoming chilly and he buttoned his coat tightly about him. He wished to think, and this dark spot was the place to do it in. Why had Old Bill lied to him? It certainly proved that "Dreams" had friends and that they would stand by her. Old Bill had been suspicious of him, therefore it would be better to keep away from the hotel and the rest of the villagers. He did not relish staying out all night, but he had done worse things, and there was no use risking losing his "Dreams" because of a little discomfort.

Coming to a halt, he felt of his overcoat pocket, and a hard lump assured him his bottle was safe, but he would have to go sparingly, for a long and uncomfortable night was before him. Puffing on his cigar contentedly, he resumed his walking to and fro like a sentry on post. The future was bright; his "Dreams" was coming back, bringing good luck with her.

Nevertheless, despite his rosy dreams, he soon became nervous and ill at ease. Several times he stopped short in his walking and stared into the darkness at some imaginary shadow. Each time his right hand slipped back to his hip and grasped the handle of an automatic.

As the lights of his hotel glinted through the trees Old Bill caught up to Mollie and Thompson, and entered with them, shouting to his wife: "Here we are, Hannah! Get everything on the table, 'cause they 'ain't got much time. This marryin' stuff requires speed. Wonder how they'll feel after bein' married thirty year, like us?"

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Hannah rushed to greet them, and almost dragged the couple into the dining room, where a sumptuous meal was spread. "I'm afraid everything's spoiled," she apologized.

The Rat, who had ducked into the shadow of a tree, felt another coughing fit coming on, and retreated to a safe distance so as not to be heard. His lungs were hurting him and he needed more dope. Helping himself to a generous "shot," the pain was soon deadened. As he wiped the blood from his lips a thought flashed through his mind. What was his enemy up to? Perhaps he had been too confident in following Mollie. Davis had a great brain, and no doubt right now it was plotting to spoil his plans. The Rat resolved to find out. He had left him at the station. Why not go back there and see what had become of him? It would be quite safe to leave Mollie, because he could see her seated at a table through the dining-room window, and it would be at least half an hour before she left the hotel. Accordingly, he melted into the darkness as he started for the station.

## LXVII

### THE RAT REMEMBERS

**G**ETTING closer, the Rat saw a faint light moving to and fro, and paused in bewilderment. What could it be? Crawling noiselessly toward it, he saw that it was the glowing end of a cigar. The light stopped suddenly, then, describing an arc in the air, hit the ground. The smoker had thrown it away. The Rat waited. Soon the person struck a match to light another cigar. The red flame illuminated his face and the Rat recognized Davis. He sneaked nearer to get a better view of him, and was helped by the moon, which was breaking through the scurrying clouds, its faint rays casting a ghostly, bluish light.

The Rat, another coughing spell coming on, tried to force it back until Davis got farther away so he could retreat, but his lungs long since had refused to obey his will and he coughed. Davis turned like a flash, and his hand came from his hip, holding an automatic, which he pointed directly at him. The Rat froze into a statue, but the gambler caught sight of his shadowy outline. "Come out of that," he commanded, in a low voice. The Rat could not disobey; the voice of Davis had unnerved him. Like a whipped cur he obeyed, and Davis, recognizing him, put his gun up and, catching him by the collar of the coat, jerked him roughly toward him. Morgan shrank from his gaze and Davis again shook him violently, which started him coughing.



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

"Shut up, you dirty rat, or I'll choke you to death," he hissed.

The Rat gradually ceased coughing, but spat out a mouthful of blood.

"What in hell are you doing way out here?" asked Davis.

The Rat for the life of him could think of no adequate excuse, and remained silent.

Davis, in anger, jerked him cruelly. "You tried to double-cross me once before, didn't you? You tried to 'jam a brace.' And now you're at it again. Well, you'll find that jamming braces on Davis won't work."

The Rat saw red. "Jamming a brace!" He remembered a long time ago when he, to save Mollie's friend, had jammed a brace, and the scene in Davis's apartment came back to him vividly. He shuddered violently.

Davis gazed at him in disgust. "I guess there's no use of me killing you; the con's got you, sure," he exclaimed, turning his back and walking away.

The Rat reached tremblingly into his pocket and took more cocaine. Davis was coming back, speaking his thoughts aloud, ignoring the other completely. "Perhaps he will be useful to me, after all. A threatening message to Dreams might jog her memory a little and show her that I'm waiting and will take no fooling."

He called the cocaine fiend to him. "Do you know where to find Mollie Eastman?" he asked.

The Rat nodded. Davis asked him how he knew, and Morgan told him he had seen her in the hotel. Tearing a page from his notebook and leaning against the side of the station, Davis wrote:

Just a reminder to be on hand in the morning.

## THE RAT REMEMBERS

He handed the note to the Rat. "Wait outside the hotel and slip it to her, and don't let anybody see you do it, and come right back," he instructed, threateningly.

The Rat put the note in his vest pocket. His brain was clearing and, strangely, with the clearing his fear of Davis was vanishing.

"Get on the job, and if you jam the brace I'll croak you," warned Davis, noticing his hesitation; then, spitting in his face, he turned his back contemptuously.

"Jam the brace!" The scene of Davis beating him in the apartment again flashed before him. With the cry of a madman the Rat sprang at Davis, and his dirk sank to the hilt in his back. With a groan, the gambler crumpled to the ground and lay face up. The Rat leaned over and, with his bloody knife uplifted, spat into the quivering face.

A look of hate in his eyes, Davis opened his mouth and attempted to speak, but no words came.

Laughing like a maniac, the Rat rose and ground his heel into the upturned face. "Lick my boots, you dirty scum!" he shouted. "*I've jammed your brace for good.*"

Davis's hands opened and closed spasmodically. "Go—to—hell!" defied he, the words dropping one by one from his rapidly blanching lips.

With a howl of rage, the Rat again plunged his knife into the prostrate body, then, withdrawing it, he held it aloft in the moonlight. At sight of the dripping blood he laughed with glee, then continued plunging the knife into the helpless form until, exhausted by a fit of coughing, he fell across the body, the blood from his lungs mixing with that of his victim. Suddenly he sat up and stared around frantically in fright. The head of Jake was grinning at him, but there was another head there; it was Davis's, and the face was torn and bleeding. The Rat staggered to his feet and looked down at the corpse. That was

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

funny. Davis's head was still on his body, and another one was with Jake. He couldn't look at two. He stooped and, getting hold of Davis by the heels, with superhuman strength dragged him to the edge of the platform and rolled the body across the railroad track, then hurried away, the blood from his lungs trickling from the corners of his mouth.

Now that Davis was out of the way, it would be easy for him to take Mollie into the land of Jake. He reached the hotel just as she and the minister were getting into their rig to drive home. Mollie had endured the ordeal of eating supper, and welcomed the lonely ride to Eagle Nest.

As the horse started, Morgan followed, bloody knife in hand.

## LXVIII

### "COMING THROUGH"

MOLLIE realized it was her last ride with Thompson and that when the sun rose on the morrow she would be somewhere in space. She gazed at the moon struggling with the clouds. It seemed so cold and so far away that she shuddered. Soon she would know all about the mysteries of the sky or the sorrows of hell.

The minister was driving, but was strangely silent. He felt a foreboding evil, a choking at the heart. He turned nervously and looked behind. A shadowy form darted into the bushes at the roadside, but he decided it was his imagination. Mollie snuggled closer to him; she wanted to have as much of him as possible before starting on her lonely journey to the unknown.

Once Thompson clucked to the horse and it broke into a trot. "Don't hurry, Westley dear," she whispered, laying a protesting hand on his arm. "I want this ride to last forever."

He did not realize that every step of the horse was carrying her nearer to death. "All right, dearest," he replied. "Isn't the night beautiful? But, somehow, I feel uneasy."

The tears came to her eyes, but she fought them back. She did not wish to die and leave him. The horse wandered to the side of the road and stopped, but Thompson made no effort to hurry him. Giving way to her pent-up feelings, Mollie threw both arms around him suddenly

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

and, drawing him fiercely to her, kissed him madly on the lips. She could not leave him. "Oh, Westley," she entreated, "promise you will always believe in me, no matter what happens. Promise! Promise!"

"Of course I will always believe in you," replied Thompson, in amazement, "no matter what happens, and I will always love you, too. My dear one is not herself to-night."

The horse looked around in their direction and, of his own accord, started on his way. He did not know whether or not to feel offended at their neglect.

When the buggy had stopped, the Rat ducked into the bushes. He was suffering from the effects of his unusual exertions. His breath was coming in short gasps and there was a smothering at his heart, as if some huge hand were squeezing it. As Mollie threw her arms around Thompson, the Rat cursed softly to himself and kissed the bloody dirk. He would soon steal her from the minister and hide her where he could not follow. Let him enjoy her while he had the chance.

He held up his hand in the feeble moonlight; it looked black to him. He stared at it in wonder. Then he comprehended; it wasn't black, it was red; it was the blood of Davis, and he, the despised, had killed him. Then noticing that the rig had resumed its way, crouching low, he skulked after it, hugging the shadows.

Arriving at the gate to Emily's cottage, Thompson helped Mollie to the ground. She trembled; this was the hardest test of all, saying good-by to him in such a way that he would suspect nothing.

"Good night, darling," he whispered, kissing her lips. "To-morrow is our wedding day."

"Oh, Westley," she sobbed, throwing her arms around his neck, "don't leave me, don't leave me! I am afraid."

Across the road, behind a tree trunk, the Rat ground

## "COMING THROUGH"

his teeth and fondled his knife. Why didn't the damned fool leave her, so that he could make a quick dart from his hiding place and, with one thrust, or perhaps two, to make sure, everything would be over.

Thompson gazed down at the girl in his arms lovingly and held her tight. "How strange you act to-night, Mollie!" he said. "But, there, I guess you are nervous and unstrung. I'll see you to the front door." At the door he looked at his watch, and it was one minute after twelve. He bent low and whispered: "We get married *to-day*, sweetheart. It is past midnight, and it's time for 'near wives' to be in bed."

He kissed her and walked down the path to the gate, then turned and waved a farewell. Mollie stood at the open door and watched him out of sight, then tiptoed into her room. It would not do to wake Emily.

The Rat cursed as the door closed behind her. Here was an unreckoned obstacle. He would have to plan a way to get into the house. But why not kill the damned minister? He had caused all the trouble. He started in the direction of the retreating form of Thompson, but paused. What was the use? It wouldn't help matters, and it might prevent him from killing his Mollie, and, anyway, his strength was waning rapidly. Sitting on the cold ground, he watched the cottage in front of him. Presently he saw a lighted lamp move in a room. Some one came to the window and pulled down the shade. It was Mollie and it was her room. Reaching her wouldn't be such a hard job, after all.

After lowering the shade, Mollie sat at her desk to write her farewell to Thompson. On the ride from Minton she had planned what she was going to say, but now her mind was blank. Finally, in desperation, she scrawled on a piece of paper:

## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Remember your promise, Westley, to believe in me always.  
I love you. Good-by. MOLLIE.

Emily had laid out her bridal clothes on the couch, and she shuddered at the sight of them; they would answer for her shroud.

Crossing to the bed, she knelt down, the bottle of laudanum beside her, to have her last talk with God.

She gazed over at the drawn shade. It would never do. She must look God in the eyes. Raising the shade and opening the window, she returned to her kneeling position by the bed.

Across the road, the Rat chuckled with satisfaction. See! He knew it! Mollie wanted him; she had opened the window so he could enter. Fascinated, he sat and watched. He had a surprise for her. She thought he was Rat Morgan, but he wasn't. She didn't remember when she was a kid that he had played with her. But he remembered, and he knew her mother, too. He would tell her all about it when they got way up there, and he looked up at the sky and shivered; it was cold.

"God," prayed Mollie, gazing at the cloudy sky through the open window, "this is the end, for your time is up and you've gone against me. But, God, I am not angry with you. Perhaps there was no other way and you've done it all for the best. They say it is wicked to kill yourself, but, God, I can't live and face the morrow. If I am about to do wrong, stop me in your own way. Now please excuse me, dear God, because I want to talk to my mothers. Mothers dear, I am coming to you both. Try and make God forgive me, because I do believe in Him, despite the way He has treated me."

She rose to her knees and crossed to the couch for her wedding dress. It was her shroud, and a proper one, too. She caressed each article tenderly as she picked it up.

## "COMING THROUGH"

Then she changed into her bridal clothes, with as much pains as if she were dressing for the altar. In front of her mirror she made up carefully. Her mother had been an actress and she would die one; it was the last act. Finishing, she picked up a small prayerbook which Thompson had given her, and once more knelt beside the bed. She reached for the bottle of laudanum. Removing the cork, she lifted the bottle to her lips, but her will power failed and she could not drink.

"O God," she prayed, her eyes closed, "even if it is wrong, give me strength to die."

The Rat saw his chance. She was kneeling beside the bed and had fallen asleep. This would make it easier for him. He darted across the road to the gate, and then, crouching low, he stepped carefully on the turf beside the path so as not to make a noise on the gravel. Then he began to cough. He waited a few seconds; everything was quiet and Mollie had not heard him. Then he crept silently to the window and peered in. She was still sleeping, with her head buried in her arms. Rising until his face was framed in the square of the window, he clutched his bloody knife and drew himself painfully up on the sill.

At the noise, Mollie raised her head questioningly and stared into his awful blood-smeared face, but she was not afraid. He was a messenger from God. After all, He had answered her prayer and was not going to allow her to commit the crime of suicide, but, instead, had sent His agent to kill her.

"O God, I thank you," she murmured under her breath, and then bowed her head to await the blow.

The Rat, puzzled, stared back at her. There were two Mollies, but one was coming out of a cloud above her. Then something in his brain seemed to snap. What a fool he had been! He had killed Davis. Now, if he killed



## THE MADONNA OF THE HILLS

Mollie, he would get her; he was waiting for her in the land of Jake. Why hadn't he thought of it before?

He fumbled in his pocket for the note Davis had written, and, opening it, read:

Just a reminder to be on hand in the morning.

JACK.

Using the stub of a pencil, the Rat savagely obliterated the writing, then turned the paper over and scrawled upon it. When he had finished, he wet the note with the blood oozing from his lips and stuck it on the window sill. Then lowering himself to the ground, he staggered down the road, cursing his stupidity for killing Davis.

Why didn't he strike? Mollie waited an eternity, then, raising her head, she looked toward the window. There was nothing there! The messenger had disappeared and she was still alive. Had she seen a vision? Had this messenger of God been a dream? Again He had failed her. She brought the bottle of laudanum to her lips, but something more powerful than her will compelled her to put it down. She was drawn irresistibly to the window and, the note attracting her eye, she picked it up mechanically, and read:

Davis croaked. The way is clear. Marry your damn minister and thank me.

JOHNNY MULDOON.

Mollie gazed at the writing in awe, the significance of its message failing to reach her brain. Then its meaning suddenly dawned on her. She was free and Westley belonged to her!

Her face lighted with a holy radiance as she looked to heaven. "*O God, you did come through!*"

Two souls in heaven smiled with joy. They had won.

Rushing to her trunk, she unwrapped her mother's photo, kissing it reverently. Then, like all women, she fainted.

THE END

PROPERTY  
OF THE  
NEW YORK











